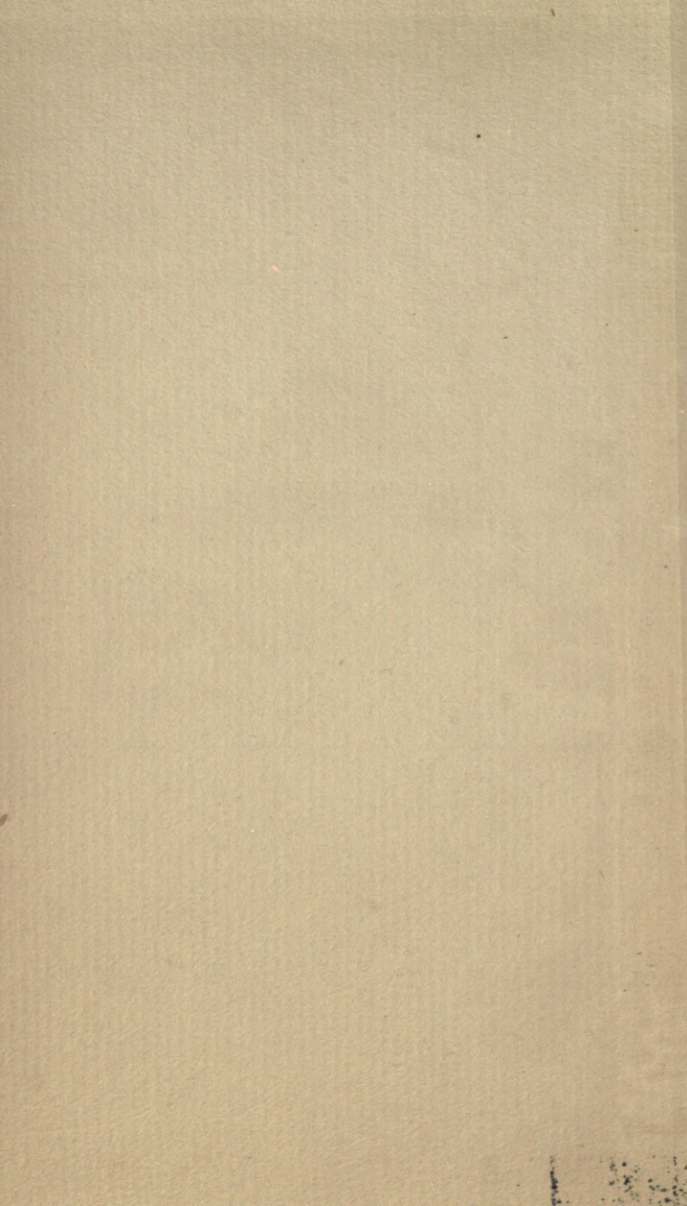


IN A
DIKE
SHANTY

MARIA
LOUISE
POOL

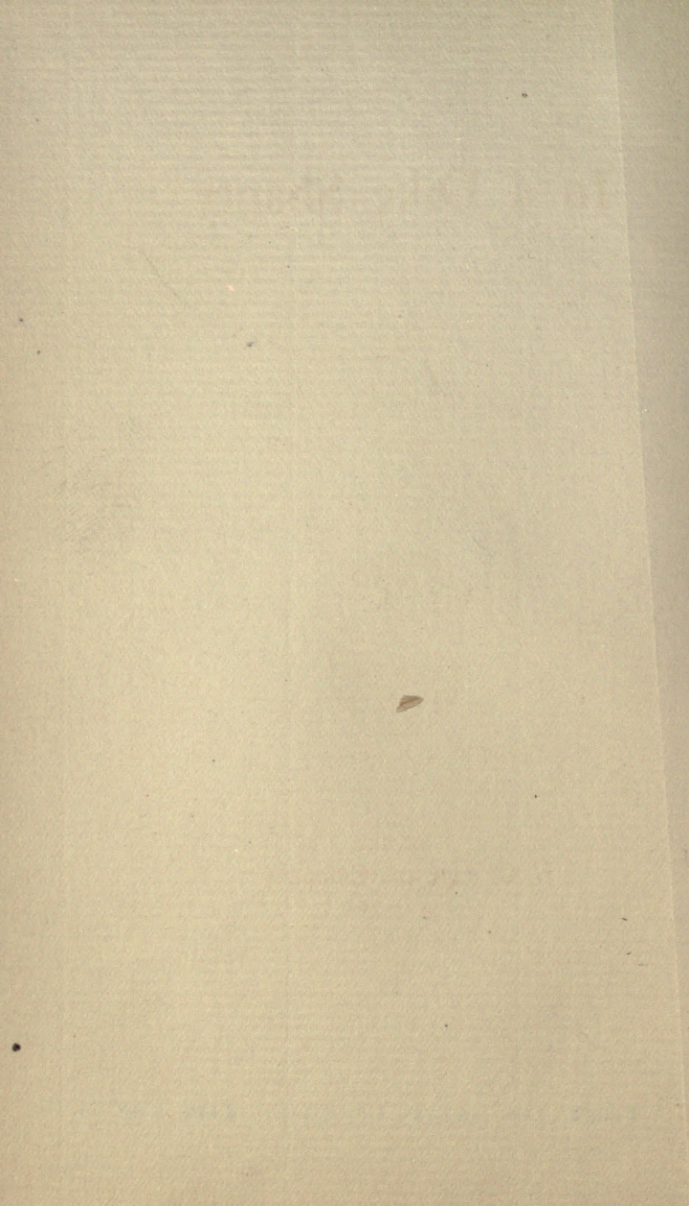
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In a Dike Shanty



In a Dike Shanty

By

Maria Louise Pool

Author of "Friendship and Folly," etc.



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TO
CAROLINE M. BRANSON,
MY PARTNER AND FRIEND IN THE DIKE LAND,
THE DIKE DAYS, AND ALL DAYS,
I DEDICÁTE
THIS RECORD OF A HAPPY SUMMER.

21.72180

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In a Dike Shanty



I

A BAFFLING BIT OF PROPERTY

WE have come into possession of ninety-five acres, "more or less," of dike land, commonly mentioned simply as "dike." We did not buy it, and no one was so malicious as to leave it to us by will. We have taken it for debt. Now that we have it people seem to blame us as well as pity us; and yet we had to take this or nothing. A person living within sight of our shanty told us yesterday that the general opinion in the outlying community was that no one but a cursed fool would have taken that kind of property for debt; and that, as for its being that or nothing, it might better by a

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“darned sight be nothin’.” But we, in our ignorance, had an idea that any kind of property was better than no kind of property. It seems we were mistaken. It is too late, now, however, for any regrets. We have gone on to the land in the company of two witnesses, and have “hereby taken possession,” etc. and have the legal papers to show for it; also we have begun to pay taxes; and taxes, every one assures us, “is the only thing the land ’ll ever amount to;” every man we meet is advising, and condoling with us. Some of them take the fact solemnly; others begin to laugh when they see us, and they ask what are the dividends from the dike. All this has begun to raise in me a spirit of combativeness which may end in my adoring this new acquisition, which lies in the town of Marshfield, on the seacoast of Massachusetts. It is, in fact, land reclaimed from the sea by a dike built to prevent the tide from coming in across the stretch of flat lying there. There is a great deal of flat in this town, and some of it is now protected in this way.

If we could afford to look at our new real estate merely in the light of its picturesqueness we

A Baffling Bit of Property

should be fortunate mortals. If you drive over Marshfield hills in early spring when the faint hue of life is coming redly to the tree twigs, and in a sort of green grayness to the great salt meadows, you will feel your heart drawn in a strange way to the very solitude. You may see a dog coursing along over the dead grass, or a bird flying above it. You will not be likely to see a human being. You will hear, just beyond the sand hills, the rush of the ocean as the tide rises. When you are down on the flats you cannot see the ocean. But, though it is not visible, you feel intimately near it, and it controls you in a blind, mysterious way. Now that this ninety-five acre tract is ours, we are going to think only of its scenic and atmospheric possibilities.

One man, who seemed to have more of a spirit of fairness within him, told us it was so rich — the land he meant — that 't would n't need no manure for years. 'T was unaccountable how rich it was. "But then," he added, reflectively, "it don't make no odds, fur 's I know, if 't is rich. You can't do nothin' with it. If you lived over to the Brant, now, and could

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work it somehow. But not livin' to the Brant, and bein' women — " here he paused.

We said it was possible to overcome the first objection, and live at the Brant, but how could we help being women?

He looked sadly at us and shook his head. He said that there bein' dikes, he s'posed it follered that somebody must own 'em, but he did think it was agin natur for 'em to be owned by women.

This same man informed us that there was a good crop of hay there every year, but it cost a thunderin' sight to git it; still —

Here he paused, and I began to suspect he was paving the way by this talk to the making of a low offer for "standing grass" on the dike. And so it turned out, for he held on to our buggy shaft until he had delivered himself of a bid for the grass, qualifying his bid by the repetition of the remark that "it would cost about as much as the grass was wuth to git it."

Time was when we would have closed immediately with this offer and congratulated ourselves that we were rid of that bother, for one year at least. Now we answered we would

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think of it, and let him know; and we were revived in spirit at sight of his crest-fallen face as he heard us.

“Depend upon it,” said my friend as we drove away, “that grass is worth getting. What if we should get it ourselves?”

The idea was too startling to be embraced directly, but it remained in our minds, slowly leavening, in the weeks that followed. We have talked over in secret the possibility of our getting in that crop and thus knowing positively the amount of it, and having some idea of what this estate is. But thus far we have been too timid to come to a decision. It is barely summer yet, and we have time in which to reach a resolve. Still we must make up our minds in season to sell before it is too late. Considering that “it costs as much’s it’s wuth” to git that grass it is surprising that so many farmers in the vicinity have made inquiries of us. They are unanimous in opinion as to the fearful expense of getting that grass. They will be bankrupt by just getting it, therefore we, of course, cannot think of charging much for the grass as it stands.

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For a month past my friend and I have talked and dreamed of nothing but standing grass. Before the green blades were hardly visible we have had them grown and cut and dried. We have sold the crop ; and we have made it ; we have done it all dozens of times. As I walk about among my friends and converse on different subjects, I hardly know what to say, for my heart is afar, not in the Highlands by any means, but in land so low it has to be protected from the ravages of the sea. When they tell me things concerning subjects in which I used to be interested, I am alarmed at the indifference I feel. I tell myself that these things have no bearing on grass or dike lands, consequently they are nothing to me. Sometimes I fancy my acquaintances look at me in ill-veiled surprise and wonder, but I cannot say to them that I am thinking of the dike. If I did say that they would have a still worse look on their faces. Society is not as attractive to me as formerly, for when I am in the midst of laughter and conversation I cannot think clearly on my favorite subject. And somebody must think clearly on it. My friend and partner takes this far more

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lightly than I do. When I remonstrate with her on account of her frivolity she says that one monomaniac is enough, and she informed me that, only the day before, when our minister was calling upon us and had expressed his sorrow for the death of Matthew Arnold, I asked him if he thought Mr. Arnold had ever owned dike lands, and if such had been the case, whether such ownership would have made any difference in his poetry.

Now I do not believe I ever made any such remark. Should I not remember it if I had done so? Though she asserts that I said that, and that the minister grew pale with apprehension as he heard, I think my friend has imagined this. But I will acknowledge that I was, mentally, in Marshfield during that call, and that, while the gentleman was talking, I made an accurate estimate of how much hay there ought to be to an acre.

There is another drawback to this new property of ours, which I have hesitated to mention.

You cannot get to it; at least, you almost cannot. The way to it, though there are few

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turns, is yet as balking and bewildering as if you were essaying to traverse a labyrinth without the guiding thread.

It is all easy enough until you get within a few miles, then you begin to be baffled.

We have been down four times this spring. It is fifteen miles away from our home, and the first three quarters of the distance we tell ourselves that we shall have no trouble this time. As we near the spot and the air begins to grow salt, we begin to be conscious of a little uncertainty. We hate to inquire the way for two reasons. The first is that when we do make inquiries, before any reply is given, we are asked if we are the two women that own some of the dike down here. Then truth compels us to say yes, and we are gazed at as curiosities that are not often seen and which must be made the most of while visible. On the repeating of our question some directions are given which mostly depend on whether certain bars are down, or gates open somewhere. As we are not yet familiar with the country hereabouts, we cannot keep these directions clearly in mind, and soon have to beg again for information, and

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again acknowledge that we are the women who own ninety-five acres of dike.

It is very singular that each time we have driven down to the shore we have somehow come within sight of our land and driven around here and there, but for a long time could not find any way to get to it, though there it lay, vast, flat, and bewitching before us, and giving the impression that we could drive right over to it. But how? Whenever we made any nearer approach we had but to come back and look. Half a dozen narrow cart tracks wound toward it, but we could not get to a single one of them. It was maddening. There was the flat and there was the big barn on it, and the small shanty where the haymakers lived when they came down to make hay and store it. All these belonged to us, and we were shut from them.

The last time of our visit, which was three days ago, we were standing by our horse's head ready to weep or swear with vexation that we could not learn the way to the dike, and contemplating the making a gap in the wall in front of us, when a man came along riding on top of

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a load of dripping kelp. Seeing our forlorn condition he pulled up his horse and looked intently at us. We returned his gaze, anxious at first regarding the future health of a man who could sit on dampness like that. We were presently relieved to see that he had a rubber blanket spread over the place on the wet kelp where he was sitting.

“Up a stump, ain’t ye?” he asked sympathetically, at last.

“Yes, I think it is a stump we are up,” said my friend.

“Can’t I help ye any?”

“No one,” said she, “seems able to make us know how to get to that flat there. This is the fourth time we’ve been here, and we don’t know any more than we did at first.”

“I declare, you’re in a kind of a fix, ain’t ye?”

As the man said this he clambered down from his load and came toward us, a long flapping piece of kelp attached to his over-all leg, and dripping brine as he walked.

At first, as he approached, he tried to occupy himself by a pretended attempt to remove this

A Baffling Bit of Property

ocean vegetable, but it twisted and clung like a serpent. He said some folks didn't like the smell er kelp, but such folks was mostly them as wasn't used to it. For his part he liked the smell of everything that was good for the land. He did not appear to realize what a broad assertion he was making, or where it might lead him. At last he held the slippery, pulpy stuff by the round place which I will unbotanically call the handle. He now stood near us, and we must have made an interesting group, the feminine part gazing off at the flats, the masculine part gazing with keenest curiosity at the feminine part.

II

TRYING TO GET THERE

“**I** DO declare,” he exclaimed after awhile, “you must be them women that owns some er that dike.”

Again we acknowledged our identity, and waited further developments, for we knew very well it would avail us nothing to try to hurry this stranger so that we might gain the sooner any knowledge of how to reach our promised land.

When we had answered him in the affirmative, his face brightened a good deal. He explained this brightening by remarking that he had heard consid’ble about us, and he had been curious to see us ever sence we had took possession. Wall, now, did we expect to make a good thing out of it? We said we hardly knew what we did expect, but our principal wish just now was to learn how to get there.

He took no notice of this hint for him to give us directions. He was reflectively drawing his

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long sea-weed through his fingers, with his eyes fixed on us. He told us it was the richest land, he s'posed, there was anywhere in the State, and he didn't care where the next piece was. He knew the man that owned next to us, and he had put out strawberries, and the size of them berries was beyond what he expected anybody to believe that had not seen um. But he had seen um, and seein' was believin', even about the dike. The dike didn't need no manure, and would n't need none for years to come.

"Took it for debt, didn't you?" he inquired with sudden directness.

Yes, we took it for debt.

"Ninety-five acres, they say?" We nodded, and he said he had guessed it must be that part which used to belong to the old Jo Tilden property. He then repeated his assertion that it would n't need no manure for one five years, he was sure of that.

My friend said gravely that if there was one thing for which she felt thankful, it was for the unanimity of the opinion about manure.

The man looked at her solemnly for a

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moment after she had thus remarked, then he laughed, and a very merry twinkle came into his eyes as he did so.

“P’raps folks have been givin’ you advice,” he said.

“No,” I replied, “folks have mostly confined themselves to saying anybody was a fool to own dike lands, and to telling us there was a good deal of grass there, but it would cost more than it was worth to get it, and how much would we take for it standing? We are waiting to hear you say these same words. When you have said them, we hope you’ll be ready to tell us how to get there.”

Again the man laughed, this time more heartily than before, and when he could speak, —

“I swow! You’ve got it ’bout right,” he said. “I was jest a-goin’ to tell you that that grass would cost full as much as ’t was wuth, but I won’t say so, seein’ as you’ve heard it before. Mebbe you’re thinkin’ of gittin’ it yourselves?”

Ungovernable curiosity again took possession of him as he eyed us intently.

My friend explained to him that we did not

Trying to Get There

know what the future held in store for us. It might be possible that we should get that grass ourselves. Then she begged once more for directions. He roused himself and said he s'posed he was a-henderin' us. Then he put his whole mind to the task before him. He said he had ben livin' not three mile from Cut River for mor'n five year, and he had only jest learned how to git round. He informed us that we had come too fur to begin with. We come through Hanover, did n't we? Yes, wall, one thing we'd better bear in mind, and that was, if we wanted to git on to that old Jo Tilden dike, which was now our dike, we must always turn into a gate there was about twenty rod from the Webster place. Did we remember that gate?

A brilliant flash of memory came to both of us. That gate! Of course, we knew now that we had passed through such a gate every time, after ignorant and prolonged groping for it.

Our informant went on to say that if we came from the Brant, why, that was different. Then it would save three miles if we left our team at the Brant and came across the Cut in a boat.

At this point we begged him not to confuse

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us by telling us now anything about coming over in a boat. Let that be for such time as we might be at the Brant. It seemed probable that we should, in the near future, be obliged to remove our residence to the Brant, in order that we might be near the dike, but at present —

“Jes’ so,” he interrupted, “I understand. I don’t wonder you feel so. I own some dike myself, and that’s why I moved down to Ma’shfield five year ago. ’Taint no use in owning dike ’less you live in Ma’shfield, yourself. You’ll find it so. When a man owns that kind er prop’ty he kinder wants to be nigh it, a-watchin’ of it, and a-experimentin’ on it. That’s the way ’t is with a man, and I don’t know why it should n’t be the same with a woman.”

It was with a thrill of something like terror that I heard these last words. Yes, I said to myself, it was the same, or worse even, when a woman was the possessor. I felt that the spell of the dike was already working on me. How penetrating, persuasive, and powerful would that spell prove? Only the future could answer that question.

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We were all three leaning comfortably on the tumble-down wall now. The horses had gone cropping the young grass by the roadside. The air was warmed by the sunshine of early summer, and the perfume of blossoms was everywhere. There was something quaintly interesting too in our companion, who was so saturated with the salt odor of wet kelp, that to be with him was almost like taking a sea bath. He was in no hurry to go. He was evidently one of those men who "love to talk better than they love their victuals," which is loving to talk very well, indeed. Also, every minute he was slaking more and more his curiosity concerning us.

He seemed autobiographically inclined. He said it was in the early fall when he first came here. His wife's father had died and left her some dike in his will. He had always had a kind of a spite against this darter on account of her choosin' him, the speaker, as a husband. He, the speaker, guessed it was along of this spite that the old man left some dike to her. Any way, there 't was, and it had got to be seen to.

I felt that this was precisely our case: there it was, and it had got to be seen to.

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“ As I was sayin’, it was fall when I come down. I drove through Hanover, just as you did, and I kep’ inquiren’ jest as I s’pose you did, and everybody seemed to d’rect me as plain as day ; and they all kinder pitied me, jest as they do you, I s’pose, ’cause I’d got some dike. My wife she was with me. By ’n’ by we come to a nice face wall, and there was peach trees growin’ above, and bendin’ down so we could git some peaches. There was a lot of ’em, and the owner was there, and he told us to help ourselves, as they was rottin’ ; and we did. They was good. Then we drove on. Pooty soon I asked the way agin, and the man took great pains to tell us, and we went on a couple of miles and turned a sharp corner to the left eggsactly as he had said, and come out opposite a face wall with a peach orchard atop. We eat more peaches, same variety as before, only the owner wa’ n’t there to this orchard. I said to my wife that I did n’t know before ’t was such a country for peaches, and she said she did n’t either. Then we went on, and I stopped next time at a store, and had the man come out and p’int. He said we wa’ n’t a mile from the dike, and we

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could n't miss our way if we tried. So we went on a good while longer than the other time, and took every turn as d'rected and, thunder and lightning! where do ye think we come out to?"

"Another peach orchard," I said.

"And with a nice face wall, and the same variety er fruit. We eat some more. Then I said it seemed to me so many face walls with peaches was suspicious; and my wife said she s'posed I knew 't was the same wall and the same orchard. She said she 'd known it every time, and then she began to cry, and to ask if she should ever see her home agin. And I guess I began to swear; and I cussed the will that had left dike to Marcia. Jest then a man come along, driving fast in an open buggy, and I jumped out and I hailed him, and he stopped, and I asked if he knew any road that 'd take us out er Ma'shfield, and he laughed and said he was goin' up to Hanover Four Corners, and if we 'd foller him he thought he could git us out.

"And I jest tackled right on to that man, and I never drawed a long breath till we were at

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the Four Corners. We lived a dozen miles away and we made straight for home, and we never seen the dike that trip at all. That was my first 'tempt to git here. But I had ter keep tryin' of course. My wife, after that time, was afraid ter have me go without her, and she was afraid ter go with me herself. You see it made it kinder hard for us, for we could n't 'ford to hire a guide 's they do in them travels you read of in books. But there'd oughter be a guide. He'd make good wages, I vum! I've often had an idee, when I've ben a ridin' round, tryin' to git onter Marcia's dike, that the old man that left it to her must be a-laughin' in his grave."

Here he paused a moment in his easy garrulity and reflectively chewed at the kelp handle. When he spoke again it was to assert unexpectedly that "gals was the queerest things in God's creation. Now my wife's niece, she's er livin' with us. She likes the dike. Yes, she absolootly likes it. She comes down, without no errand, and walks on it. She says there's er charm to it. She says there's an 'indescribable charm.' But then, you can't

Trying to Get There

account for gals. This one 's been teaching that school over to the East. Last term her health give out, 'n' she 's ben helpin' my wife sence. The change done her good. If you should make any stop here she 'll come 'n' see ye. She 's kinder Southern by birth, but there 's a good deal of Yankee to her, I tell her. You 'll like her; that is, you will if she happens to let ye; 'n' I guess she will."

Although at another time we might have been more interested in this girl who was kinder Southern by birth, just now we felt that we could not indulge this person in talking about his wife's niece. We recalled him to the subject of the dike by expressing our sympathy for his wife regarding her legacy. He returned with zeal to that topic. He grew loquacious again.

When you meet with one who has endured the same pangs which are now afflicting you, how you hate to part with him. He is like an old friend.

III

WE GET THERE

I FELT like clinging to this man whose wife had been the heiress of "some dike," and who had just told us of his experience, while his load of kelp and our buggy waited. He had been obliged to move to Ma'shfield. He may have had a pleasant home about which fond reminiscences clustered, but the spell of the fiend was laid upon him, and he left that home.

"Do you think," I said timidly, when he paused and again chewed the kelp, "do you really think that we also shall be compelled to live near?"

"Can't say, positively, in course," he answered; "but I prophesy you'll do jest that thing eggsactly. And if you do, and when you do, you take my advice now; you come to the Brant. The Brant's the place for women. I guess I'll be goin'."

We Get There

He turned abruptly away, trailing his kelp over his shoulder, and climbed up on to his moist load. He took the lines and smiled with pity and sympathy as he cautioned us to be sure 'n' go right back to that gate by the Webster place. I wanted to rush after him wildly and beg him never to leave us until we were on the Jo Tilden dike. But I stood still in silence as becomes a woman.

The man's horse strained and pulled, and finally started. The man turned toward us, and said with great impressiveness, —

“Mind, I tell ye, the Brant's the place for women. And when ye move down, don't forgit that I've got a pesky nice little house to the Brant that I'll sell reasonable.”

The reins were slapped violently, and the odorous pile moved out of sight.

We had resumed our places in the buggy and were preparing to turn round, when our friend suddenly appeared at the front wheel and said, —

“I meant ter have told ye that if you do git in that grass yerselves, I c'n do it for ye's reasonable, 'n' more so, 'n most anybody. My name's Peake; live over on t'other road; any-

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body 'll tell ye where Rodge Peake lives. If my wife ain't able to call on ye, her niece will. We 'll be neighborly, anyway. It's about all we c'n do. There's a good deal to contend with on this coast. But I don't want to discourage ye."

Then he was gone again. It was dreadful for us to be left to suspect that he had not been disinterested when he had said that the Brant was the place for women.

"I have resolved upon one thing," said my friend, as we successfully drove through the right gate, and were actually on our unimpeded way to our land, "and that is, that if we are such thralls of the dike that we have to move down here, I shall not go to the Brant. There is where I shall go."

She pointed to the shanty which was now perfectly visible in all its desolation, standing on the unutterable flatness of the flats. I did not know that anything could be so level as was the stretch before us. It was so uniform that it made my head swim. It unrolled in an unvarying extent that was suggestive of entire vacuity. It made one frantic. And there was

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the barn, blacker, more dismal than the shanty. It was a very large barn; it told plainly that there was a good deal of grass on the dike.

The flats were a divine green now; I could not deny that; nor that it was a sweet wind that gently came from the ocean; nor that the wild sea birds flying about were precisely the proper birds to be sailing above such a landscape. Yes, it was a solemn and mysterious place down here.

I felt it more and more as the horse trotted noiselessly over the path toward the stable. The little settlement at Brant Rock was in partial view. Between it and us flowed, without a ripple, the narrow Cut River. The cliffs of white sand shone out there in the morning sun with a glitter that in my present mood was almost mocking. The level was now melancholy, the future outlook depressing.

The very subtlety of the beauty on every hand was only another reason for sadness to an unquiet soul.

"It is a good spot for a suicide," I said.
"I never was in a place so far off."

"You are hungry," was the cheerful response.

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“You want your tea. It is not the soul which is gloomy. It is the stomach which is empty, —two states of being often confounded with each other. This is a good place in which to live with a conscience that is clear. If you do not consent to come down I shall think it is because you are haunted by the memory of an undiscovered crime.”

We had carefully brought the keys to the padlocks which fastened the barn and the shanty. We had never visited either building. We now found that our house key was quite superfluous. The staple had been pulled out and the door now swung partially open. Whether this condition of things was due to the free and easy manners of strolling gunners we could not tell, and it made little difference.

It was not a well-furnished residence. In fact the furniture consisted of a stove, so seamed and rent that it trembled as we walked near it; a very large frying-pan, still showing unmistakably that the last thing cooked in it was fat salt pork, and a pack of extremely greasy playing cards placed in a careless manner on the ledge of the only window in the place. This was the

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furniture, unless bunks can come under that head. At the end of one room there were three bunks built one above the other. A ragged bed quilt was in the lower bunk.

I took up the cards. They were so dirty I could not tell the queen of hearts from the knave.

I advanced to the bunks.

Did something move in the thickest mass of that quilt? After a pause I went nearer. My friend was examining the frying-pan. Certainly the ragged cover moved. The next moment a languid, wizened Yorkshire terrier came slowly into view from among the folds. For a Yorkshire terrier to be languid speaks volumes as to what it must have endured. This creature sat up feebly on its haunches and looked at me from behind its hair. And I looked at him. In a moment its very small tail wagged a very little; I joyfully knew that I was approved. Still he did not get down. Perhaps he was too weak. He was such a scraggly, emaciated terrier that my heart ached over him.

“Do you think it was he who took off the staple and the padlock?” suddenly asked my

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friend over my shoulder. She had left the frying-pan and was gazing with me.

The dog looked at her and wagged again.

“Oh, the angel!” she cried; and then to me, “Surely you cannot refuse to live in a house where you have found such a precious little thing as this? It must be a sign of good luck to find a darling terrier already under your own roof. I would rather have him than a horseshoe.”

He whined in a fine, small way now, which made us remember our lunch-basket. It was brought, and the dog kindly accepted all the cold chicken it contained. Then he revived wonderfully, and jumped off the quilt, thus showing still more plainly how thin he was. He was very grateful. He licked our hands and was extremely attentive; but he was only a diminutive hairy package of bones, and he could not frisk much.

“I suppose,” said my companion, reflectively, “that he either owns dike lands or has friends who own such property. That is what has so reduced him.”

It is astonishing how long we discussed the

We Get There.

dog, he lying out on his side and keeping his shining eyes on us as we talked. We thought he would be such company while we were getting in the hay.

Yes, without actually giving my consent, I yet knew that I should come down here and see about that grass. When a human being hates to do a thing and is at the same time absorbingly curious to know how it would seem to do it, be assured, that thing will be done. There was no other way to lay the demon that possessed me. And we should live in this shanty. I looked about me. It might even be that we should play "Old Sledge" with that pack of cards. We might also come to saying "I vum," when we felt somewhat emphatic. And that frying-pan, — should we use that during the days, while we came to think salt pork was good food? And in the nights should we sleep in those bunks?

My friend followed my glance, and hastened to say that she had always heard that there was nothing in the world so health-giving as to sleep in a bunk.

"And think, then," she went on, "what it

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must be to sleep in a bunk in a shanty on a dike. Nothing can be more stimulating. I know that we are both perfectly well, but we shall be laying up a store of — ”

Fortunately this speech was interrupted by a sharp bark and a growl from the terrier, who was looking ferociously toward the open door.

“How 'r' ye?” said a voice. The voice was so thin and so shrill, and came from such a height, that we were greatly confused for a moment.

“Carn't ye make yer pup shet up?” it asked queruously, as the terrier went off into a spasm of sharp barks.

4 The speaker was in figure something like an animated rake handle. He had a head that somehow instantly suggested a white onion. It was not much larger ; it had very little hair, no hat, and no expression whatever, save a kind of parboiled look.

“Who are you?” I asked, perhaps too brusquely. The answer was immediate and startling.

“I? Oh, I'm Mar Baker's idjit.”

We did not know what response to make to

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this. Mar Baker's idjit looked us over with entire calmness, and for an embarrassing length of time, before he told us "he seen a buggy 'n' the shanty open, 'n' thought he'd call. He guessed we was them women that owned some dike, wa'n't we? Wall, what he wanted mostly ter say was that if we got the grass in ourselves he wanted the job er rakin' after. He could rake after like er house a-fire, and when we paid him he could go to the Brant 'n' have ice-cream. He never had 'nough ice-cream yet. Did we like it? And did we think 't was colic-y? Mar Baker thought 't was colic-y."

Without the least warning this person then left us, and we watched his enormous length moving along over the flat in the sunshine, the smooth head lopped on one side. The terrier looked also, shaken with a final series of barks. Then he lay down to rest.

While the dog rested we also reposed as well as we could on two chairs which, in their present state, were not calculated to invite idleness, for one of them had only three legs and required artful balancing against the wall. The other had lost the top of the back, so that the

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spokes had opportunity to thrust themselves under adjacent shoulder-blades, opportunity of which they availed themselves, with the remorselessness characteristic of inanimate things.

We sat thus, pretending to rest, and conversing upon the possibility of a general rehabilitation of the shanty, and wondering if the person we had just seen were a specimen of the neighbors.

Our words were desultory and spoken lazily. We had ridden far and were getting sleepy. I was leaning my head drowsily against the wall, and wishing the bunks looked cleaner, when I became aware that the small guardian who had partaken of lunch with us was on his feet bristling and growling. He gave one short bark, then wagged his tail as if deprecating his mistake.

Immediately there came within my line of vision, through the open door, the figure of a girl.

She was leading our horse, and when she was near enough to speak she turned and saw me.

"I was afraid you would lose your horse," she said, smiling a little. "I know it is yours for Mar Baker's son told me. It had wandered

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almost to the main road, cropping grass. You must have forgotten to hitch it."

Yes, we had forgotten. Besides, the man who owned it had averred that, if the beast had a virtue, it was that it would stand without hitching. What he had said was "that critter 'll stand er hundred years 'thout bein' nigh er pos' nor nothin'."

The terrier left the shanty and investigated more closely, growling provisionally. His ultimate decision, however, was favorable. As my friend and I stepped out upon the rank, thick grass and had a nearer view of the newcomer, we felt that we shared the dog's approval.

The stranger's hand still rested on the bridle. She was tall and dark, how dark it was impossible to determine accurately, for her broad hat was pulled far over her forehead, thus making a deep shade on her face.

She was not dressed with that almost painful accuracy which is usually perceivable in the attire of the ordinary country Yankee girl, who will sacrifice grace for the sake of a strict right angle any time. I think such a genuine Yankee would have said that the person before us was not tidy.

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To me she seemed better than tidy, she seemed attractive. I did not care if the blue silk neck-tie about the sailor collar was not quite straight, or if there happened to be a rent in the dress skirt which she was holding up with the disengaged hand, or if she wore one glove while the other was partially protruding from her pocket. A true daughter of the place would not have worn one glove now, but would have had the pair rolled up in a round ball in her pocket below her handkerchief.

This girl spoke grammatically, but with a kind of drawl, and with an occasional elision of a letter, but not the elision common in these parts. There was also a certain indolence in her speech which made it unreasonably delicious. The voice had a kind of fulness, something that seemed ripe, as a fine fruit may be ripe. But she was too young to have such tones, which, in all justice, should not belong to any woman in her twenties, and this woman could only be on the uttermost verge of her first score of years.

“I reckon I might tie him here,” she said, indicating a stake which was driven in the

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ground a few feet away, and which probably had been put there for this very purpose.

She pronounced "here" almost with a long sound of "i" in it.

She struck us more and more as being decidedly "worth while."

She proceeded immediately to unbuckle one rein, draw it out and twist it round the stake, finishing with a horse-knot. This operation was contradictory to her appearance and voice, and went far to show that, if not a Yankee, she was, as they say, "faculized" as one. To be faculized is to possess "faculty," and faculty is the attribute dearest to the New England heart; it is the attribute which enables one always to land on one's feet; which is the entire opposite of "shif'lessness." I suppose it is owing to being faculized that so many New England people can get a living, nay, a comfortable living, off a piece of land which consists apparently of nothing but rocks and huckleberry bushes. It is the secret of homely thrift.

When the girl dropped the end of the knotted line from her hand she looked toward us and smiled again. Not the alert and acute smile

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which we expect on the face of an intelligent girl born and bred here, but an expression having a certain slumberousness, and a something which made it the appropriate expression to accompany her voice.

We had not spoken yet, and we now hastened to thank her. We explained that the horse had been warranted to stand. Then we acknowledged that we had been so interested in the dike that we had completely forgotten our steed.

The girl leaned against the animal as she absently drew out the glove from her pocket and began straightening the fingers. She appeared to be interested in us and not willing to go immediately.

“Perhaps you don’t know how to harness and unharness? No. I thought you did not from the way you looked at me when I tied that knot. I know how. It makes a woman quite independent. I’ve learned since I came to Uncle Rodge’s. Would you like to have me take out your horse and put him in the barn there, so that he may have his dinner? I hope I am not officious?”

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We eagerly said that she was not officious, and explained that, if we had thought anything about the animal's dinner we had thought to stop at a stable somewhere, though it did seem as if the man had put oats in the buggy. We looked. Yes, there were the oats and the halter under the seat.

The girl unfastened the rein and jumped into the carriage. As she pulled up the horse's head from its instant search for grass she leaned toward us and said interrogatively.

"I reckon you are the ladies who own some dike here?"

Perhaps she saw by our faces that we had been expecting that question, for she began to laugh and we joined with her.

"I know you are," she said in her slow way, "and every person you have met since you came to Marshfield has asked you if you are. You are famous. Women don't own dike much down here. We are all watching to see what you will do with it. We are just living now to see if you will get in your grass yourselves. Do, please, get it in yourselves!"

She slapped the horse's back with the reins

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and the animal started at the slowest kind of a walk toward the barn. As the buggy wheeled round, the dark face was put out, and its owner laughed noiselessly as she said, —

“For all our sakes, please get it in yourselves!”

If we had seen our new acquaintance abroad we could have classified her directly as an American; seeing her here we must try to place her still more definitely. She could not be a Northerner, for if she were there would hardly have been that peculiar ease in her friendly cordiality. On the other hand if she were not a Yankee would she ever have thought of learning how to harness?

As we stood looking at the receding back of the buggy it occurred to us that this must be Mr. Peake's wife's niece, she of whom he had said “that she was kinder Southern by birth, but there was a good deal of Yankee to her.” We thought it made an enchanting combination, this being kinder Southern and yet with a flavor of New England.

The horse and buggy had been out of sight in the barn a few moments when the girl appeared.

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She waved her hand at us, and then strolled leisurely across the flat toward the road.

After she was gone it came to our minds that we should not know how to put the harness on the horse, and it might be many hours before a man would come within call. There were glimpses of houses here and there at a distance on the higher lands.

Doubtless there was more than one man residing near who would be more than willing to harness for the sake of seeing how the women looked. But how should we let him know when he was wanted? This question assumed very large proportions as the sun began to go toward the West and nobody was visible over the whole stretch of the flats. Not even a solitary horseman wound his way along that far-off high-road at the edge of the dike lands.

We had lunched; we had rested; we had examined the shanty so that we knew accurately how thorough must be the house cleaning that would make it fit for our habitation.

We had become happily intimate with the terrier, who responded ardently to our advances.

Now the time had come when we could no

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longer disguise from ourselves that our way home was long and complicated, and that our horse must be prepared for his journey.

We went to the barn feeling that forlorn desperation natural to the woman who has a horse to be harnessed and no man to do it for her.

There was the horse placidly blinking in his stall. That complication of straps and buckles known as a harness hung on a peg against the wall. Have you ever tried this kind of work without knowing in the least how to do it? Did you ever swing the saddle on and carefully try to adjust the crupper round the horse's neck?

There was one thing we knew, or rather there were two things: we knew the saddle when we saw it, and we knew it was worn in the middle of the animal's back. But not until after laborious experiment did we demonstrate that the crupper did not go about the throat. Here may be a good place to state that a person should never try this experiment with a crupper and a horse unless the latter is warranted to be perfectly gentle under all circumstances. No right-minded man or woman could blame a

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beast for resenting the attempt to put about his neck the leather meant for his tail. Besides, the strap will not go round. A woman, however womanly in her inefficiency she may be, can only try to make it go round.

We tried until we were crimson with our exertions. Then my friend remembered another thing about a harnessed horse: it always had a bit in its mouth. This recollection of hers shed a great light upon us. Knowing that the saddle went on the back and the bit in the mouth, we went to work afresh with such zest that in half an hour we drove across the flat with a tremulous feeling of triumph. We were triumphant because the horse was in the shafts and was pulling the buggy. We were tremulous because the whole turnout had such an odd look.

We knew that the first man we met would stop us. It would not be necessary for us to stop him.

We had driven through the gate near the Webster place and perhaps a mile beyond when we saw a farm-cart coming with a man sitting slouched forward on the seat. As soon as he was near enough his deliberate gaze began to

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sweep over us. Just before he came opposite he pulled on his horse and grinned.

“I guess you harnessed yerselves, did n’t ye?” he asked.

He put one hand on his horse’s hip to steady himself as he stepped out of the cart.

“It was the horse we tried to harness,” said my fellow-sufferer with more meekness than is usual with her.

“Wall, wall,” he said, and began to unbuckle and pull straps as it seemed to us all over the harness.

When he had finished he stepped back and surveyed us exhaustively.

He said he guessed we were all right now. He told us it was thunderin’ lucky he met us ’fore we come to no hills. He added that he would n’t advise no women to drive down no Ma’shfield hills with the britchin’ hitched up on to the saddle instid of into the hooks on the shafts where britchin’ belonged.

At our request he explained, so that even we comprehended, that those long loops of leather were to be hooked on to the thills to keep the carriage “from runnin’ on to the hoss.” We

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learned that "no hoss could be expected to stan' it to hev a carriage runnin' on to it. It was too much to ask of a hoss."

As we listened to him we realized for the first time that carriages are subject to a kind of demoniac temptation to run into horses.

We thanked this man. Then we went on, one of us driving and the other holding the terrier.

IV

ORLANDO AND OZIAS

“’**Z**IAS jest as lives do it’s not. In fact, I think he ’d ruther.” We had been living in our shanty more than a week when this remark was addressed to us.

The voice that gave us this assurance was high and thin, and precisely like that of Ozias Baker, commonly known as “Mar Baker’s idjit.” Indeed, if I had not seen the speaker, I should have thought it was ’Zias himself. But it was his mother, a woman almost as phenomenally short in stature as he was tall. At nine o’clock this morning I had looked across the flat toward the west and had seen two figures approaching side by side. One was like the shadow a person casts at noon, and that was Mar Baker; the other was like the shadow he casts just before sunset, and that was ’Zias.

I did not reprove the terrier for going into a convulsion of barking at sight of these two

Orlando and Ozias

forms gradually lessening the distance between them and the shanty.

I did not state at the proper time for the statement that when we had found the terrier nearly starved in the bunk he had worn a collar, a fine chain silver collar. We were so pleased with him and he was so pleased with us that for some time we scrupulously refrained from examining the plate, difficult as it was to abstain, lest we should find the dog's address and be compelled by honor to write to his former friends. Already we had learnt that, if you are going to spend any time in a shanty on dike lands, the sweetest companion possible is a wide-awake, knowing, watchful, affectionate Yorkshire. With him we were not only resigned, but contented. How cheerful he was! He seemed really to radiate cheerfulness. A dozen times a day he told us that the jolliest life in the world was to be on a dike and to get in your own standing grass. His brown eyes shone so through his hair that you could not be gloomy when you met his glance, which was every time you looked at him.

It is superfluous for any one to tell me how

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cowardly and dishonorable it was not to look immediately on his collar, and make every attempt to restore him to his owner. We knew how wicked we were. Whenever we hugged him and whenever he touched our hands with his tiny red tongue we said to ourselves, "Oh, how they must long for him!"

We felt remorse; but remorse, as Owen Meredith and others have assured us, is not penitence. We did not turn from the evil we were doing; we kept on in it, suffering, and yet happy.

Besides, to add to our guilt, this creature was valuable pecuniarily. He was thoroughbred, and showed his breeding in looks and behavior. But we would have gladly paid all he was worth to own him. Could we not at any time mortgage a slice of dike? or we could pay in dike itself, only, unfortunately for us, dike has not yet become a legal tender.

But when, at the end of two weeks, we courageously read the inscription on the collar plate we felt greatly relieved, although the duty of advertising still remained. There were but two words on the collar, and they were these: "Orlando Inamorato."

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Of course this was the name of the dog. It was a large name and he was a small dog, but when we tried it on him we saw that it fitted him perfectly. It was pathetic to see his demonstrations of joy when we addressed him as Orlando. He leaped and frisked and whined, and showered caresses on us. Before this we had mostly called him such things as "Dearie," and "Duck," and other words suitable for two women to have thought of unaided by a masculine mind. Strange to say it had never occurred to us that his real name was probably Orlando Inamorato. Hitherto also we had supposed that Furioso was usually the surname of Orlando, but we were thankful it was not so in this case, for any womanly woman must much prefer Inamorato. This suggests love, and conjures radiant visions of Angelica before she made her lover furious.

We each embraced Orlando so that he nearly died; but even when he was almost smothered he would give us quick licks with his scarlet tongue and lovely glances from his eyes.

Yes, I thought to myself, his last name is certainly correct. We promised the terrier that

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we would love him so that he should never miss his other friends ; we would be to him more than any people ever were to a dog before.

In the midst of this my friend propounded the question as to whether, by any possibility, that name could be the name of the owner too. And she said we must advertise. She would not wait a day longer, for every day but forged more strongly the chains which bound her to this dearest, darlingest creature that ever lived. And if the advertisement should be answered, and we be torn asunder !—but we could not bear this thought. However, we were resolved that we would not go on in this sin any longer.

Jointly we composed an advertisement then and there. We would send it to one Boston paper. One was enough ; one would ease our consciences.

The notice, when finished, read like a personal, but that was no matter. We liked it ; it was a trifle mysterious also, as personals usually are, and we liked it for that. This is the way it read :—

“To the old friends of Orlando Inamorato.

Orlando and Ozias

He is well ; he is happy ; he is beloved. If former friends wish to communicate, address —."

We gloated over this. We showed the paper to Orlando, and he barked approval. He assured us that we might have added to "he is beloved" the assertion "he also loves." We thought of rewriting and adding this, but as I took my pen to do so, Orlando rushed to the door, glanced over the flat to the west, and began to bark convulsively as though a platoon of robbers were coming toward us ; and I did not blame him, as I have stated, for what he saw was Mar Baker and her son Ozias.

They lived in the first house on the road that skirted the dike. The house was not much larger than our shanty, but it was clapboarded, and painted in vivid greens, with white trimmings and blinds. This had been done by Ozias. His mother said she had told him if he'd put his mind to it and paint it, he might choose the colors. So he had put his mind to it, and each day his mind appeared to vary as to the shade, and more or less coloring was put in the paint pot every morning. As he only painted an hour or two in the fore-

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noon, there was great variety of tints, each tint showing a day's application.

Mar Baker said she s'posed the wood'd be jest as well kept, and for her part she 'd got past caring. 'Zias was jest as the Lord made him, and if she could live in that house, she guessed her neighbors could bear to see it.

Mar Baker had been a widow for thirty years now. 'Zias was her only child, and the father had died three months before the birth of this son. She was as keen looking in her way as the terrier was in his, and in alertness reminded me of him.

I used to look at her and wonder how she learned to bear it, when, years ago, she had hoped this child would be a comfort to her, and when each day told her more emphatically than the day before had done that he was "different." And he grew more and more different as time went on; instead of growing brighter he grew less bright. He was not an idiot, but that's what everybody called him, and he certainly had very little mind. He required to be controlled and directed constantly. He had a perfectly smooth face, and his voice was an exact

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reproduction of his mother's voice. He had called his mother "mar" for so many years that everybody called her Mar Baker now, even "to her face."

"I tell you, Mar Baker's had a tough time," said a store-keeper at "The Cut" to me. "You know her husband, 'Zias, was killed by a stone fallin' on him. He was a stone mason. He was brought home dead to her. I d' know's she's ever cried a drop for him. My wife don't think she has, 'n' I don't think so neither. I've heerd tell that cryin' 's 'nough sight better 'n not cryin' when you're in trouble. Lizzie Marks, that's what she used ter be, was kinder pooty, for them as likes these small women, 'n' 'Zias was awfully in love with her. They was marrit jest two years. How she gits a livin' I d' know, for she never would take help any way 'less she worked and paid for it. She said she knew what her husband's 'pinions of paupers was, and she wa'n't goin' to be a pauper. Oh, yes, she 'll do any kind er work, and glad to."

This was what I had heard about Mar Baker, and now she stood at our door. She had just told us that 'Zias would jest as lives take our

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letters to the post-office and bring ours from there. She said there was nobody more faithful than he was about some kinds of arrants, and letters was what he was sure on. He'd carried them for neighbors for years and never met with no accident.

He grinned eagerly while his mother said this. We sent him off with our personal about Orlando, while his mother sat down on the door-step and fanned herself with her apron.

V

MOWING THE DIKE

MAR BAKER fanned herself for some time with so much vigor and so much muscular action that I grew warm just looking at her. She was sitting in the door-way, and Orlando had planted himself on his diminutive haunches a few feet from her and was panting and watching her narrowly. Occasionally she dropped a corner of her apron, which she was using as a fan, and extended her hand toward the terrier, remarking "good doggie" as she did so, in that way people who do not like dogs assume when in their presence and in the presence also of the canine's friends. When she called him good doggie Orlando would stop panting for a flash of time, as if he could thus better examine a person who addressed him in such a silly manner.

"I seen this dog a ha'ntin' round on the dike a good while 'fore you come," said Mar

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Baker. "I should er give him some old victuals, only all our scraps go to the hens. I've always thought he might b'long to a carry-all of fine folks as come ridin' by a week or so 'fore you brought your things down. I can't tell why I took that notion, but I did take it, and 'Zias thought the same. But then there's a good many high-flyers travellin' about to see the Webster place and so on."

We listened to her with fear in our hearts. What if some high-flyers in a carry-all should come out on to the dike and claim our terrier? But there was comfort in the conviction, which came immediately after this fear, that whoever tried to get to the dike would wish he had not made the attempt, and it would be an exasperating failure. Orlando was safe to remain with us as long as we did not go off the dike. It might be we should always live on this flat. Reasons for such a residence seemed to thicken around us.

"When do ye calkilate to strike on the grass?" inquired Mar Baker.

We told her we expected Mr. Peake to come with men and a mowing-machine to-morrow.

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She turned quickly toward us.

“You don’t mean Rodge Peake’s goin’ to git yer grass for ye?”

Yes, we meant that. Was anything the matter with Rodge Peake that he should n’t do this for us?

Mar Baker’s nipped-in mouth closed with a snap, and she positively refused to say anything more than that she always made it a rule never to talk about her neighbors.

Having said this she went on in a general way to tell about the whole family of Peakes. Whenever she made a positive assertion she would immediately qualify it to such a degree that it amounted to nothing, and we began to grow confused. She said she s’posed the Peakes knew what they was about when they had that niece er Miss Peake’s come there to live. She ’d nothin’ agin the gal for her part. In fact she was one er them kinder gals that made er warm spot in yer heart when she looked at ye ’n’ spoke to ye, ’n’ ye did n’t know why. ’N’ though her father was er Southerner ’n’ she was born down there, she was faculized. She could do most things she set out ter do. Mar Baker

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guessed it was the Yankee blood in her that made her smart. When she got upon the subject of "Miss Peake's niece" she stopped qualifying.

We asked why the Peakes shouldn't have the girl there. Our guest fanned more vigorously than ever and looked mysterious. At last she answered that she was n't thinkin' of the Peakes when she said that ; she was thinkin' of the gal.

These words but added to the uncertainty in our minds. Was it going to hurt the girl to stay there ?

Mrs. Baker again nipped in her mouth and looked across the flat. Then she brought her eyes back to us and opened her mouth to say that there was young Peake. He'd ben nigh bein' turned outer college, they said, 'n' he might be home any minute. Here she began to qualify again. "But *I* ain't nothin' agin young Peake. I d' know 's he 's much ter blame considerin' who his father is. But I ain't er sayin' his father ain't good 'nough.

"I s'pose Leife'll be to home any day now."

"Who is Leife?"

"I thought ye knew. He's Peake's son,

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Eliphalet. He never 's called nothin' but Leife. I will say he's er young man as loves his mother. He 'n' his father set their eyes by Miss Peake. Leife could n't think no more of her if she was his own mother. You know he's Mr. Peake's first wife's son."

Here the speaker sighed heavily and was silent. We kept silence also, feeling that this woman was thinking of her own past, and how all its promises of love and happiness had failed.

When she spoke again it was to utter unexplained condolences because we had engaged Mr. Peake to get in our hay.

She ended by asserting again that she always made it a rule never to talk about her neighbors.

Very soon after making this statement she went home, leaving us a prey to vague and morbid apprehensions. What would Rodge Peake do to our grass? What, in the nature of things, could he do to it? These questions presented themselves, mingled with random inquiries about Leife and the Southern niece, in all kinds of grotesque forms in our dreams through the night.

In the hours when we tossed on our bunks

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we felt, more than ever before, what a dreadful thing it is to be at once women and the owners of standing grass.

But at five o'clock we were cheered by hearing a great deal of loud talk to horses, and a jumble of men's voices mixed with Orlando's incessant barking.

Rodge Peake had come with three other men, two horses, and a mowing machine. He greeted us with great heartiness, said he was going to run the machine that day, and the other men would spread and turn when they "wa'n't mowin' round the aidges." My friend expressed a disbelief in any "aidges" to that dike; she averred it was one continuous sweep, like any other infinite extent.

Mr. Peake was very brisk and very jolly. He said he guessed we should find there was a good deal more aidge to the dike than we seemed to think now 'fore we got through with it.

Then he turned and called to one of the men who were taking scythes, rakes, and forks from the cart.

"Leife," he said, "come here 'n' be introduced to these ladies that own this dike."

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The youngest man in the group came forward and took off his hat, standing easily before us, as his father, with great pride, informed us that this was his only son, in fact, all the chick or child he had.

The only son bowed but did not attempt to make any remark. He was rather good looking, closely knit, with square shoulders ; what might be called a "flat-backed young fellow," with muscles well trained.

He did not appear to share the general eagerness to see us. Probably he had other subjects to occupy his mind. Whether rightly or not, we had interpreted Mrs. Baker's words as meaning that "Leife " was dissipated in some way. Perhaps he was ; but his brown face did not bear the usual marks made by dissipation. He was very wide between the eyes and square about the jaws. He wore no beard and his face suggested the word "massive." His faults, whatever they were, did not come from weakness of will. His face was a great contrast to that of his father, whose chin was so far from squareness that it almost had a childish look.

The whir of the machine had been going on

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for an hour before we remembered that we had promised Mar Baker's son that he should rake after. It was an engagement that must not be broken. We could not be the cause that should prevent Ozias from earning some money that he might buy ice-cream therewith, even at the risk of colic to the buyer.

I rushed out of the shanty, followed tumultuously by Orlando. I signalled to Mr. Peake, who sat enthroned on his machine. He saw me, and down went the brake, if that is the name of it. The horses stopped.

"Wall?" he said, evidently expecting nothing better from women than that they should stop him in the middle of his work every moment or two.

I told him we had engaged Ozias to rake after, and that I would go after him on the instant.

Rodge Peake's face contracted into a frown.

"Oh — thunder!" he said, evidently having begun to say something else, but out of respect to me changing his exclamation. I was grateful for his forbearance, and I proceeded to explain, that I knew he had taken the work and was to

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hire the men, but that I pitied 'Zias, and — I don't know how much further I should have extended my remarks had not Mr. Peake cried out with still more irritation, "Of course I know all 'bout that! But what I want to know is, be ye prepared to have this dike o'yourn strowed round with toes, and p'raps feet 'n' legs; 'n' I d' know but heads 'n' shoulders?"

As he asked this gory question I looked at him in silence. It did not seem necessary that I should tell him in words that it was sufficient to have a dike, without having it "strowed" in that way.

"'Cause," he went on, "likely 's not that 's the way it'll be if you have 'Zias to rake after. I had him on my dike the fust summer I got in hay there. I did n't know any better then. I never suffered s' much in my life 's I did tryin' ter keep that critter away from the knives. As 't was, the best I could do I could n't help his gettin' the tips er two toes on his right foot clipped off smoother 'n time. Did n't 'mount ter much, but they bled, 'n' somebody run for Mar Baker, 'n' she looked at me 's if I'd done it a purpose. He was barefooted, 'n' by

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George ! how the knives clicked along onter his foot ! What I want to know is, who's goin' to be responsible for Mar Baker's idjit's feet if he comes on to this job ? ”

I did not feel as if I could be responsible. Before I could say this, however, Mr. Peake resumed in a still more explanatory manner : —

“ You see 'Zias, he is bewitched to git close ter the machine. He won't keep away from it. If yer business is to rake after, you ain't no business skulkin' 'round these knives. He's weaker-minded, I do believe, 'bout a mowin' machine than he is about another created thing on God's earth. Now, you c'n do jest as you think best, only you must understand that I ain't responsible. I will say, if I know he's on the dike, even to t'other end of it, my backbone begins ter creep 'n' creep, if I'm on this machine. G 'lang ! Git up ! ” These last words were spoken to his horses in token that this interview was at an end. But I pressed still nearer. Mr. Peake tried to look resigned as he let his horses stand still.

“ I hate to disappoint such a creature as he is,” I said. “ I suppose there is no objection

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to his coming on the field when you are not mowing?"

"Jes's you say," answered Mr. Peake; and this time the horses started up and the machine began to click. I was left standing in the midst of the fallen grass, which sent up its fresh fragrance to me. But I could not be soothed. It seemed peculiarly appropriate that, at that moment, from out in the direction where I heard the waves rolling, I should also hear a loon laugh.

I began wading in the tall, uncut grass toward the road. I had it in mind that I would see Mar Baker, though I did not know what I should say to her. Of only one thing I was sure; I must not be the means of depriving 'Zias of his ice-cream at the Brant; and I was well convinced that he would not be allowed to receive that dainty through any eleemosynary channel.

When I clambered at last over the wall that separated the dike from the road, I had come to no decision other than the vague one that I would be guided by circumstances.

The door of the little green house was open. There was nothing between me and its occupants

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but a screen of mosquito netting tacked on some laths, which had been put together with a painful and only partly successful imitation of a screen-frame. As I came close to the door I heard the voices of mother and son ; and, though hearing them together, I could not distinguish one from the other ; the words enlightened me.

VI

AT MAR BAKER'S

SOMEBODY was whimpering and snuffling like a child who is getting ready to have a good cry. I stood on the door-step. For a wonder Orlando stood by in perfect quietness; his ears were pricked up, and he was looking at me as if asking if I thought that person would really cry, after all.

I glanced through the netting. I saw 'Zias standing at a table before a pan of peas. He was almost covered by a long calico "tire." His face was snarled and twisted, and his under lip was hanging loose and trembling. He was shelling peas in a slow, perfunctory fashion.

Before I knocked I looked at the mother. I had never before seen on any face such an expression of determined endurance. It was set and hard, but set and hard only that the owner might keep her grip on her sanity and her duty.

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If she softened in one degree she dared not meet the result. In that moment I knew it was the look which her face wore when she was at home ; the look which had grown with thirty years of the life she had lived since her husband, who had been " awfully in love with her," had been brought to her dead. And there was her only child, standing with towering, imbecile head, opposite her, and only keeping at his task because she watched him. She was kneading dough on a " cake-board " laid on the table.

" 'Zias," she said, " if you 're goin' to cry 'bout it, I d' know what I shall do ! If I could rake after with ye, 't would be different, but ye know I must do that washin' 'n' ironin'."

Then I knocked, and Orlando barked.

'Zias immediately stopped whimpering, in his eagerness to know who had come. Mar Baker took her hands from the dough, spatting them violently together to shake off the flour, and came toward the door ; she was followed by her son, who had absently seized a handful of shelled peas as he started, and who as absently dropped them on the floor when he saw me.

" It's so hard ter git this screen open and

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shet," said Mrs. Baker after she had greeted me, "that I sh'll have ter ask ye to go round to the back door."

When I reached the back door she was there, with the head of Ozias rising high behind her. She was holding the door open a few inches and saying that, if I had n't no objections, she guessed she'd let the dog stay outside. She always was kinder 'fraid er mad dogs somehow. I indignantly assured her that Orlando was not mad, but that he could stay outside. She now put back the door just far enough for me to squeeze in, which I did hurriedly, lest Orlando might come too. He did make the attempt, and at the same time 'Zias flung a handful of pea-pods at him.

When I was safely in the bit of a room, Mar Baker said she had noticed that folks always did say their own dogs wa'n't mad, but she never seen one yet but what was jest as liable as could be to run mad any minute. For her part she liked dogs, but she liked 'em in their places, and would n't I set down?

I sat down, and she resumed her bread moulding. 'Zias, taking advantage of the presence of

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a visitor, did not go on with his work, but stood up, his head just grazing the ceiling, his arms a-kimbo, looking at me. Before I could think how to begin my errand he broke out : —

“ I say now, mar, I guess she ’s come ter git me ter rake after. You ’ll let me go, won’t yer ? ”

The small woman bent her head lower over her dough. I said I did come about the haying, but that there was n’t any need to rake after until they began to cock up the hay at night, and also when they put it on the cart for the barn.

“ But I oughter be on the dike so to be ready ; mar ! mar ! ” With this cry the tall being again began to make signs of crying.

Scarcely knowing what I did, I rose and walked to the window. I looked out on the wide flats in silence. In summer and winter Mar Baker had the flats to look at from her house. In summer the hue was deep green, with, toward the ocean, the diamond-like sparkle of the steep, sliding cliffs of white sand. In winter there was rarely much snow, and the great, desolate stretches were dark and sullen under the sharp sunlight ; and within, no live creature but her boy. This was what she knew of life ;

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this and the never-ceasing struggle not to be a pauper, for she remembered "what her husband used to think of paupers."

As I stood there I felt a slight touch on my arm. Looking hastily round and down, I saw Mrs. Baker close to me.

She glanced out and said aloud, "Should n't wonder if you got a shower on yer grass 'fore night ;" then in a hasty whisper, "'T ain't safe for him ; say you don't want him."

As she went back to the table 'Zias came forward. His small nature was capable of being suspicious.

"Mar, what ye whisp'rin' about?" he asked whiningly.

"Don't be silly, 'Zias ; I ain't a whisp'rin'," answered his mother, promptly.

He turned to me, and began to laugh a little as he asked how much I would give him an hour for rakin' after ; and he added immediately that he guessed he liked lemon ice-cream 'bout 's well's any.

"I came over to say I thought I would put you on some other job," I made answer, wondering what on earth the other job would be.

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The mother glanced gratefully at me, but the vapid face of the son clouded over.

"I'd ruther rake after," he said, "'specially if there's a merchine somewheres round."

"'Zias!" said Mrs. Baker severely, and the long form shrank back and seemed to double up.

I was trying frantically to think of what other work I could find for 'Zias, but the more I tried the blanker my mind was. I went toward the door. I paused and said I would let 'Zias know by to-morrow; that he should have a chance to earn his ice-cream. Mrs. Baker looked up at me. To her face there came an indescribable expression that for the first time made it possible for me to believe that she "had ben pooty once."

What she said was, "I'm sure I'm very much obleeged to ye."

As I turned to go the door was opened from the outside, and there entered the girl who was said to be "Rodge Peake's wife's niece." It was rather strange that I had not yet heard her name mentioned by any one. She seemed to me decidedly worthy to be designated more accurately. I knew her, for she was the one.

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who had done us the doubtful favor of unharnessing. She knew me also, for her warm smile had recognition in it.

Mrs. Baker, with the liking for "making introductions" so characteristic of most country people, hastened to mention our names.

She called the girl Miss Vance, and Miss Vance offered her hand.

Orlando seized the moment of this ceremony to rush in past our ankles and begin to make havoc with the pan of pea-pods which Ozias had thoughtlessly set on the floor. While I was rescuing the pea-pods and chastising the wicked Yorkshire, I heard Miss Vance's languid voice telling Mrs. Baker that there was no need for her to hurry about that washing after all, any day this week would do. The girl said she thought she would come and tell her, so that Mrs. Baker might take up other work if she wished.

I rose to an upright position with Orlando in my arms in time to see the expression of keen liking and of gratitude on the little widow's face as she looked at the tall girl.

"The land's sake!" exclaimed Mar Baker, "I'm glad you told me, for now I c'n finish

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that slop work 'fore I wash. It was kind of ye, Miss Vance."

Miss Vance laughed softly. She had seated herself and was leaning far back in her chair with her feet pushed out in front. She glanced at me.

"If Mrs. Baker compliments me, don't believe her," she said; "I'm too lazy to be good. Now to-day, for instance, I'm so lazy that I told aunt I could not stay in the house. I want to be out in the hot sun. Some people are afraid of it. I love it hot—hot. I am going up on the hills to pick green huckleberries to make a pie. Aunt has not much appetite, you know, — at least Mrs. Baker knows," — turning to that person who was now kneading dough ferociously in her haste. "She thought a green-huckleberry pie would be nice. Perhaps 'Zias would like to go with me and pick some for you. I sha'n't hurry. We shall be gone a good while. I have a lunch with me. We will sit up there in the melting sunshine, and smell the sweet fern and look at the sea. Are you ready, 'Zias?"

'Zias was in a tremor of excitement. He

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tried in vain to unfasten his tire in the back. I, being near, stood on tiptoe and did this for him just as he began to cry, "Mar! Mar!"

He took his hat from a peg. He said he was ready, and what was Miss Vance er waitin' for?

Miss Vance did not wait. She rose from her chair, told Mrs. Baker that she need not worry if she did not see 'Zias till sundown, and then the two walked off, 'Zias having taken from another peg in the bit of an entry a two-quart "rind" in which to put his berries.

I looked at Mrs. Baker, who was now tossing a portion of dough back and forth in her hands preparatory to putting it in one of the buttered tins in readiness on the stove hearth.

Although her face was not a speaking one and although she was silent, I yet felt keenly her own emotion of relief and thankfulness that her son would be safely out of the way for several hours.

Again I started to go, and this time nothing hindered my departure.

As I opened the door Orlando rushed outside and began to bark vociferously. I instantly

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feared that somebody was claiming him, and that he was resenting the fact. Naturally our continual fear was that his owner would come, and that we could not prove the claim false.

As I put my foot on the doorstep, Mrs. Baker said she guessed he was running mad, and she kept carefully on her side of the door, thrusting her head out of a small aperture in the most cautious manner.

By this time my acquaintance with Orlando had taught me that, though he always barked when there was real occasion, he also always barked when there was no occasion at all, beyond that provided by his own fertile imagination.

He was now standing at the roadside in front of the house, his small body quivering with his protective and belligerent efforts, as he gazed persistently in one direction. I looked in the same direction and saw a beautiful horse saddled, a beautiful young man dismounted and tightening the girths. The young man had a hooked riding-stick under his arm; he had on corduroy leggings, russet foot-covering, a velvet coat, a jockey cap, and immense long yellow buckskin gauntlets. I was so dazzled as I looked at him that

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I wanted to shade my eyes from his effulgence. I have neglected to state that he also wore a long yellow moustache, and a divine little tuft of beard on his chin, trimmed down to a point that gave the last degree of bewitchment to his appearance.

As I stood, bereft of any power of motion, given over wholly to admiration, this young man finished adjusting the strap, turned and saw me. He led his horse nearer, Orlando suddenly sitting down on his haunches and growling dangerously.

The stranger took off his cap.

"I beg pawdon," said he, "but can you direct me to what they call the dike?"

"That's what they call the dike," I said, pointing.

"Thanks — so much," returned the unknown, and swung himself into the saddle.

"But you can't ride on to it from here," I went on, conscious of a great deal of uncouthness in myself. "You must go back to the Webster place and inquire for the gate." Then, impelled by curiosity, I asked him if he had bought any dike.

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“Bought any?” he repeated. “No; why should I buy dike?”

“I’m sure I don’t know,” I returned, “but there’s a good deal for sale.”

“Ah! Is it possible? I hope your dog won’t frighten my horse. It’s the Jo Tilden dike I want.”

Orlando had made a dive at the horse’s heels.

“I hope your horse won’t kick my dog,” I answered. Then I told him that he must go back to that gate, unless he wanted to go to the Brant and come across the cut in a boat.

He thanked me again. He pulled up his gloves. He said he was awfully sorry to have given me so much trouble; then he cantered away along the white road, the dust flying about him.

Up at my left, in a field that rose gradually toward the old pastures where horse briers grew and thickets of sumach, and where the stunted savins and pitch pines all bent to the west because of the east wind, I saw two figures, one tall and almost swaying over from its slender height; the other that of a girl wearing a broad hat, and who swung a tin pail as she walked.

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They were not very far away ; and, as I looked, the girl turned, I imagined to see if the ocean were yet visible. She saw me, and called to ask if I would go with them, at the same time flinging up the pail toward me. Her voice was lusciously sweet as it came down the warm air.

The young man cantering in the dust heard it and looked. He lifted his cap with great deference and a touch of gay defiance.

Miss Vance plainly had not seen him until he made his salutation. She gave no response to it, and continued her journey after my shouted refusal of her invitation.

As fast as I could, I climbed back over the wall, the loose mossy stones moving dangerously as I climbed. I went swishing through the grass, forgetting to try to think of something for Mar Baker's idjit to do, remembering only what a magnificent young man was on his way to Jo Tilden's dike, and that Jo Tilden's dike was our dike.

When I told my friend, she dropped her novel and cried out, " It's the dog ! "

" But he and Orlando did not know each other," I asserted.

VII

AN ORDER FOR BUMONGE

“WHEN a young man with a head the size of a cocoanut, and a forehead the width and breadth of my two fingers comes down to Ma’shfield ’cause he wanted to fish ’n’ hunt where Daniel Webster used to, it don’t seem like the ’ternal fitness of things, somehow. But I guess he won’t amount to much with his gun and rod, or anything else, at present.”

The speaker was leaning forward from the seat of an old buggy which was drawn by a horse that, the instant it was allowed to stop, seemed to droop into weak curves in all its limbs as it waited.

The woman in the buggy had driven across the dike up to our shanty as being the nearest house at which to ask for a roll of cotton batting that could aid in setting a broken arm. It seemed that the effulgent young man in riding-

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dress had come to bitter grief after he had entered the gate leading to the dike. He had been thrown from the saddle, and this woman told us he was in an awful way as to his insides, besides having no end of broken bones. "He was taken right into Mrs. Grant's, and there he'd have to stay one while," the speaker guessed. She'd been calling to Mrs. Grant's when it happened, and "she'd driven right off'n' got the doctor, 'n' now she was sent for cotton battin', and she s'posed she must n't stop a minute." But the temptation to give us more details of the accident was so strong that she allowed her horse to remain drooped while she said "she never seen nothin' go off 'm a horse as he did, 'n' she did n't believe them leggin's or them yellor gloves would ever be fit to wear again. The feller was goin' to try to hire a shanty for self and friend to come down and camp out in, 'n' fish, and so forth. He told somebody up to the Cut that he guessed the reminiscences of Daniel Webster'd make it interestin' here, though he did n't take it there was much round besides reminiscences. I don't know," she went on, "who told him to come to the Jo Tilden dike; it was a joke, I

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reckon. I d' know what Mrs. Grant's goin' to do. He can't be moved for nobody knows how long. I'm goin' to stop up to see if I c'n git July Burns to come and nuss him, for Mrs. Grant can't no ways do it with her lameness.

“'N' there's that Miss Vance to Rodge Peake's; p'raps she could spell July 'bout the case if it come to that. That Virginy Vance ain't got much vim you might think from her 'pearance, but she had a Yankee mother, 'n' that kinder saves her, you know. She c'n kinder 'complish things, somehow. But she's mighty diff'runt from us folks — outlandish, I guess. But I can't stop.

“That young man's right in Mrs. Grant's parlor. So you ain't got no cotton battin'? I did n't really expect you had, but I thought I'd make sure. G'lang!”

She pulled convulsively at the reins, and the horse, after two or three efforts, started off in a walk, the buggy reeling and wobbling after him.

I felt pretty sure that the occupant of that buggy would stop faithfully at all the houses in the pursuit of batting, and thus she would be

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the first to tell the news of the catastrophe through the hamlet.

The next day, as we sat on the shady side of the shanty, watching Rodge Peake riding his mowing machine, and noticing the absence of Leife, we saw a woman in a sun-bonnet coming toward us. Having subdued the demonstrations of the terrier, we had leisure to observe that this person bore in her hand a small paper bag and a tin quart measure, and that she was very portly of form and deliberate of movement. I offered her the chair in which I had been sitting, and she sank down in it, keeping the tin carefully upright. I saw now that the tin contained milk, and I waited to know why she had brought milk to us. She was in no hurry to speak, and only nodded assent when I brilliantly remarked that it was a warm day. Finally she said she "told 'um over to Mrs. Grant's that she must have a mouthful er fresh air, and she guessed she 'd do their arrant for 'um. She told 'um also that, as their hands were 'bout as full's they could be, she presumed likely the two women in the shanty, who couldn't have nothin', skurcely, to do, would be willin' to

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help so fur as to make a mess of bumonge for 'um. The doctor had ordered bumonge, so 's to build up the tissues, he said, and there 'd got to be some made by somebody. She had brought the moss," — extending the paper bag, which I took, "and the milk," holding out the measure, which I also took. Standing thus helplessly before her, I said, timidly, that I had never made any bumonge in my life, and I might spoil the materials. Still I was willing to try to aid in building up that young man's tissues.

The woman looked at me with a slow scorn growing in her broad, stolid face.

"Never made no bumonge!" she repeated. Then she looked 'round her as if in search of some one who could share her amazement. "Never made none! I declare! Hm-m-m," — going off into an inarticulate sound, which we learned later was characteristic of her, and seeming to fall into a kind of meditation from which she roused to say that "there wa'n't nothin' 'bout bumonge that a child could n't understand. It was jest to put the moss into some cold milk, 'n' bring the milk slowly to a bile, then strain off into cups. All there was to it was not to

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let the milk scorch, which milk was bound to do if it anyways got a chance. Continooal stirring was what it needed, though some folks nowadays had a double biler. Had we got a doublebiler?" My friend said that we had not thought a dike shanty was an appropriate place for such a luxury, and so had not brought the article she mentioned. Our visitor had begun to meditate again, and so did not appear to hear this remark. She was not in any hurry, but sat with her big figure and fat face somewhat thrown forward in her chair. She presented a curious appearance, caused by having a very small head, and still, in some unaccountable way, a large, pendulous kind of a face. Who was she? Was she the woman who had been meant when the messenger in the buggy had spoken of July Burns, as the person who would have to come and "nuss that young man"? July was pronounced like the month of like orthography, and not as a corruption of Julia. I hardly dared to ask who it was who had thus put us to making *blanc-mange*. It would seem to one who casually thought on this subject in all its bearings, that the nurse would be the one who

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should concoct dainties for her charge. But that may not be the way things are done on or near a dike.

The reverie of our caller was apparently so profound that we did not wish to disturb it, and so waited until such time as she should rouse herself. This rousing occurred after about half an hour, when she put a hand on each side of her chair, and so, as if raised by a species of leverage, she rose to her feet. Standing thus she advised us to make the bumonge before night, as the milk came from Dan Grant's cow, and that cow's milk would sometimes bonny-clabber in twelve hours. "And," she added, "I may not feel like comin' after it, 'n' you 'd better, one of you, run over with it yourselves."

When she had left us we lost no time in conversing about this stranger. We could only begin immediately to make a fire and other preparations, that we might cook, for it seemed to us that we could almost see the milk of Dan Grant's cow begin to "bonny-clabber" as we looked at it. The moments when we "took turns" in standing over the hot stove and in stirring the milk lest it scorch were very wearing.

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perspiring moments. We felt as if we were grossly imposed upon, and yet we should doubtless have been considered brutes if we had refused to do this.

At that critical moment when the milk is at once the nearest to scorching and to being sufficiently cooked, Orlando barked outside, and I heard the voice of one of the haymakers. It was my turn at the stove, and my friend went out to come back just as I had swung the kettle off the fire. I thus had leisure to listen to her as she said that the man had told her that Rodge Peake had stopped mowing; that he had not taken his horses from the machine, and they were dragging the machine anywhere in the grass. They, the men, did n't know what to do, so they had come to us.

“Where was Mr. Peake?”

“Oh, he fell off the machine, 'n' they guessed he was asleep out there on the dike somewhere.”

“Fell off? Did he have a fit?”

The man smiled broadly and arranged the short birch stick which fastened his one suspender in front.

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“Guess ’tain’t much of a fit. Leastways, I guess it’s the kind of a fit that folks has after they’ve be’n swillin’ whiskey into their-selves.”

My heart fell.

“Has he been swillin’ whiskey?” I inquired.

“Yes; always does when he’s hayin’. Now, ye see, we are in kind of a fix, ain’t we?”

I recalled what Mar Baker had hinted when she knew who was to get in our grass. Why had n’t she spoken plainly?

One of the other men must immediately get on the machine and begin to mow. So we said. Then we learned that Rodge Peake, before he had fallen from the machine, had run it on to something not meant for it and broken it. At last one of the most intelligent of the men gave us his sacred promise that he would do his best to get the machine mended the next day. Meanwhile he would go home, and would stop and let Peake’s wife know ’bout things.

“She’ll come and git him,” he added. “He’ll be sure to be drunk three or four days.”

We began to think we knew why Rodge

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Peake's wife's father had not approved of his daughter's choice.

It was not in a pleasant frame of mind that my friend and Orlando and I started forth at sunset to go to Mrs. Grant's to deliver the bumonge.

VIII

IT JELLS

AS we left the shanty in the early dusk to go to Mrs. Grant's "up on the aide of the dike," we each bore two cups of *blanc-mange*, arranged on respective plates. Orlando, however, was not thus burdened. He only had with him his ever present sense of his own importance, and his unlimited capacity for protective barking; thus equipped he naturally felt that he was ready to go anywhere, and he cantered on ahead with the utmost satisfaction.

I ought to have mentioned that when July Burns had brought the milk and the moss together with her order, and had given us directions for the concoction, she had neglected to tell us the quantity of moss required for the given amount of milk. Our one great fear when we came to consult our judgment in the matter was that we should not use enough moss to

It Jells

sufficiently thicken the milk, and we kept putting in one spray after another as the milk was heating. My friend remarked several times that we should never be forgiven if the stuff should n't "set" in the cups so as to turn out like jelly. "Whatever happens," she said, "this bumonge must jell."

I had to go up to Mar Baker's and borrow a strainer, and as a gravy strainer was all that she had, it was with the utmost difficulty that we poked the warm mixture with a teaspoon through the strainer in very small quantities at a time. In our anxiety a good many drops went on the floor in a very coagulated state, and were instantly gathered up by Orlando, who developed a strong liking for this kind of food. We were directly relieved of our fear lest this product should not jell, for before it was half pushed through the strainer it was nearly as stiff as cheese, or rather like the white of a hard-boiled egg, and by the time it was in the cups was so solid it would require a knife and some muscular power to attack it. My fellow-laborer thought there was too much moss, and I thought there was not enough milk; we were both of the opinion that it would

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be a capital diet with which to build up the tissues of the young man lying disabled at Mrs. Grant's. The *blanc-mange* had a good look to it and it tasted well, and these two important requisites decided us to take it to Mrs. Grant's, as we had been told.

The Grants lived in an old house, set so near the road that carriages must occasionally run over its flat front "door stone." It had not a tree near it, and from its south "end window" there must be an extensive view of the dike. To those who loved the flat, and I now could easily imagine the place awakening an ardent and peculiar love, such a view must be a constant delight, filling the soul with vague, large dreams. But to those to whom these wide expanses, with the ocean thundering beyond, suggested only a monotonous gloom, the old Grant house would be a melancholy place of residence. Each wild bird that flew toward water or toward land would suggest a spirit escaping.

The house was too low for even its chambers to command a glimpse of the sea. It was low in structure and low-toned in every way ; beloved of chimney swallows apparently, for, as we ap-

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proached, several of those birds were flying in and out of the enormous mouth of the chimney. The cracked and blackened front door had a row of small window panes above it. The door was swung open, and in the entry sat Mr. Grant smoking, his back to the passer-by, and his legs supported on one of the stairs, which began their ascent directly opposite the door and not many feet from it.

Mr. Grant turned his head when he heard our footsteps, clinched his pipe tightly between his teeth, and called out, "Lyddy! Lyddy! Here 's company!"

We immediately heard a limping sound from one of the back rooms, and an extremely unkempt looking woman came into the entry, nodded at us, and said, —

"Daniel, I 'd know 's anybody c'n git by you, settin' 's you be."

Mr. Grant now took his pipe from his mouth, hitched his chair a little to one side, and said, —

"If they can't git by me, Lyddy, you know there ain't a woman in the world but what can git round me."

He chuckled, and we smiled as we pushed into

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the kitchen where the woman beckoned us. We bore our plates as circumspectly as we could.

As she shoved chairs toward us, Mrs. Grant said that July had told her that we were goin' to be so kind as to make some bumonge for that unlucky feller as had broke hisself about all to pieces. We explained that we were asked to make the *blanc-mange*, but we had never made any before and did n't think we had been very successful. Mrs. Grant pulled her spectacles from her forehead down to her eyes, looked at the contents of the cups, and said it seemed to have jelled. I replied that we feared it had not jelled but petrified, whereupon she smiled and guessed we put in too much moss, but it was a good deal better to have too much than too little. This was said in such a genial way that we both felt in better spirits than we had done since we had been requested to make this article of food. The terrier was also encouraged to put his forepaws, which were quite muddy, up on Mrs. Grant's lap, and to receive a few kind pats, which he took as no more than his due. She told us that this dog had come to her house before our arrival, and she had fed him several times. He seemed

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“awful thin and awful lonesome, and I tell you I pitied him. I’d have took him in, only our cat won’t have a dog ’round. But he looks as if he had found some good friends now.”

Here a door opened the other side of the house, boards creaked, thin partitions wavered, and then July Burns appeared in the open doorway. She greeted us silently, then sat heavily down in a chair near the door, and immediately began to meditate. Mrs. Grant moved her hand slightly toward July and said, just as if she were not present. “That’s a way she has. I s’pose she’s a restin’. I often wish I could rest ’s easy ’s that. ’Tain’t no use tryin’ to rouse her. She’ll rouse herself when she gets ready.” This prophecy was fulfilled about ten minutes later when July lifted her broad face, and, glancing at the dishes on the table near us, said she hoped we’d had good luck, but then a child could make bumonge; there wan’t no diffikilty ’bout that. No one made any reply to this, and Mrs. Burns went on to say that her young man, that is what she called her patient, and I thought he would have liked to hear her, had dropped into a doze, and she thought she’d jest come out ’n’

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change the scene a little. She thought nusses was expected too much to stick to the sick-room and git sick theirselves.

While she was speaking she had put her hands to the sides of her chair, as she had done at our shanty, and had thus risen to her feet. She walked over and looked at the *blanc-mange*, putting the square end of her fat forefinger on to it.

"Simps to me," she said, "it 's jest like injy rubber. I d' know whether my young man can eat it or not, or if he does eat it I would n't wonder if it distressed him. Did n't have no luck, did ye?"

"If it were India rubber we wanted, we had the best of luck," said my friend, somewhat tartly.

"I did n't know 's anybody could help making bumonge right," said July.

Here Mrs. Grant interposed by saying good-humoredly that it made all the difference in the world whether a person was used to a thing or not. And then July said she'd come over to our shanty in a day or two and she'd show us, for likely 's not there'd be more needed. As for this mess, why, if her young man could n't

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eat it, she could, as she loved them kind of victuals.

Before she had finished these remarks we heard a tossing, and some muttered and impatient words from the room where we decided that July's patient was lying. She heard also, and before she left us to go to him she said he was jest as fretful 's he could be, and she never yet worried till folks stopped bein' fretful. She told us further that he had said something about sendin' to Boston for one er them trained nusses, 'n' she told him if he wanted to fling away his money he might, but that she herself would n't give in to no trained nuss that ever stepped. "'N' I told him that I had n't no objections to havin' help from amongst the neighbors 's I knew on. I thought of gittin' Miss Vance to come over 'n' help me watch with him sometimes so 's to give me a chance, 'n' I guess I sh'll send for her to-morrer. Yes, I let him know my idee of trained nusses.

"He ain't said nothin' more 'bout it sense," she said in conclusion. Then the floor creaked again and the partitions vibrated as she went back to her charge.

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Even the good-humored Mrs. Grant seemed roused by the mention of trained nurses, a subject upon which her ideas were vague, but emphatic. She said with great force that human nature — I think she meant humanity or charity — had bid her take in that poor critter when he got throwed and smashed up so, 'n' her house was turned topsy-turvy for him. Human nature had gone so fur, but it could n't be expected to go to the length of havin' a trained nuss under her roof. She was goin' to stop there. If July Burns, who had took care, fust 'n' last, of nigh everybody at the Cut or the Brant, savin' summer visitors, could n't do for him, with help from the neighbors, if necessary, in course, why, then he need n't be done for under her roof, 'n' she was prepared to tell him so, if it come to that.

Mr. Grant here spoke from the front entry, where he had continued smoking, —

“Now, Lyddy,” he said, “don't cry 'fore you 're hurt. July Burns'll git that feller up in a week or two.” He looked full at us, took his pipe from his mouth, and in a barely audible voice he continued, “Any feller that had the wit of a goose 'd git up off his sick bed piaguy

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quick, so's to git where he could n't see nor hear that woman. Now, in my opinion, that's the kind of a nuss to hev, the one that'll git ye up the soonest."

His wife said remonstrantly, "Daniel!" but Daniel only went on smoking. We rose to terminate our call. We said constrainedly that if we could do anything we hoped they would ask us freely for our help. Mr. Grant went out a few yards along the road with us. I thought he had come thus far that he might say something, but he stopped in the same objectless way in which he had started, went back, then told us over his shoulder that he guessed we should have a good hay day to-morrow.

These words recalled the facts that Mr. Peake's mowing machine was broken, and Mr. Peake himself was drunk. These facts we had for a moment forgotten. It was bright starlight now. There was not a breath of wind, not a sound; even the ocean was noiseless. As we walked on, two women on horseback came cantering in a cloud of dust from the direction of the Brant. In this cloud of dust we saw the tall form of Ozias coming from the post-office. We were

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always anxious when he returned from such an errand lest he might bring an answer to our advertisement about Orlando. This latter individual was now growling and capering at the heels of the errand boy. The terrier had from the first revealed an — I was going to say an unmanly, certainly an — undogly dislike toward Ozias. This undisguised animosity may have had something to do with fostering Mrs. Baker's belief that our dog was always running mad.

The half-witted being had earned two pennies, for he had brought us two letters. His fund toward an ice-cream debauch was slowly growing. But he still bewailed the fact that he was forbidden to earn more money by going on to the dike when the mowing-machine was in operation. In reference to this subject, Mar Baker had said that, though the Lord had n't given 'Zias as many brains as other folks, he had given him as many arms and legs, and she was going to try to keep 'em from being cut off.

IX

A LETTER AND A NERVE ATTACK

THE interior of a shanty. A small kerosene hand-lamp faintly illuminating the cracked stove and the row of bunks at the end of the room. The screen door accidentally left open, and mosquitoes and large moths flying in. A scent of damp newly cut hay mingled with an odor of salt pervading the place. A Yorkshire terrier sitting on the table in the direct glow of the light, and watching with keenest eyes the movements of two women who seem somewhat excited over an open letter which they have evidently just perused. Reader! This is our shanty, it is our kerosene lamp, our terrier — oh! would he were indeed ours! — our mosquitoes, our moths, and we are the two women with the letter. It is one of the missives which Ozias brought and we paid him two cents for it. It seems misery enough to have it without the consciousness that we have also paid for it. But

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still it might be far worse than it is. With every perusal that we give it, our consciousness that indeed it might be worse, and our relief that it is n't, grow stronger and stronger. It is an answer to our advertisement concerning the dog, which notice appeared some weeks ago, so long ago in fact that we have been able day by day to thrust more and more successfully from us the fear that there would ever be an answer. The envelope is postmarked in Glasgow, Scotland. The writing is of that tall, slim, ladylike kind wherein each letter is precisely like every other letter, and which one does not read but divines in some unexplainable way. We have divined it, or we think we have, and this it is: —

“Dear, unknown friends of Orlando across the water: Arthur has just happened to see your advertisement in an old Boston paper that we found in our state-room. Arthur is my husband, and we have come on our wedding trip to Scotland where his parents were born. I've been sick almost every bit of the voyage, and you don't know how lovely 't is to be on land again. Arthur says I shall love Scotland as he

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loves it, and I begin to feel sure I shall, but then I've been so sick coming over that I should dote on almost anything that did n't reel and pitch and creak. He just looks over my shoulder and suggests that I say something about Orlando. Of course, he is right. There never was a sweeter dog than that one. My brother gave him to me. He, my brother I mean, was studying something about Italian literature, and he said it was a good joke to give the dog that name. Perhaps you'll understand it. I'm sure I don't. Arthur says there's no need for me to understand it. We missed him one time when we were visiting the Webster Place. Arthur says I must give you my address, but how can I when we expect to travel for the next six months, and to be abroad for a year or two? Arthur says there is nothing like seeing other countries to make a man appreciate his own. I know you will be kind to my own dear doggie. Hug him hard for me and kiss his little black nose" — here we paused to obey this request, and then, when Orlando had almost knocked the lamp over, we went on. "Arthur thinks from your advertisement that you will be

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just as kind as can be to him — the dog, I mean. He says that I'd better let you keep him, the dog, you know, until we come back, as you seem to be so attached to him, to Orlando, you understand. Arthur is watching me so as I write that it is quite confusing. Arthur says you'll be sure to be thankful for the privilege of having him, — oh, dear, of having the Yorkshire, I mean. And as for me, I cannot express how grateful I am that Orlando has found sympathetic friends. I have worried awfully about him, and I just cried for joy when Arthur showed me the notice. I mean to write to you again, and I implore that you will occasionally send me a word about the dog, though Arthur says that would be no end of a bore to you.

Gratefully yours,

ROSE EVANS McDONALD."

This was the letter, and it covered four sheets of note paper, so extensive was the chirography. At first we did not notice that Mrs. McDonald had not, after all, given any address, but on looking closely over the sheet we found no more hieroglyphics, and turned to each other

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with thankful glances. Why did not Arthur have his wife put on an address? He must have been absent from his bride when she really sealed the note. Yes, indeed, it might have been a good deal worse, even though my friend suggested that Rose Evans McDonald, by the time she returned to her native shores, might be so tired of her Arthur that she would be glad to resume her Orlando. But there were a great many chances in our favor. Mrs. Arthur might choose to settle in Arthur's Scotland, or she might even die. But it was wicked to speculate thus. The present was our own. When the time drew nigh for the return of the McDonalds, we might abscond. As for giving up Orlando,—that alternative had grown more and more fearful to think of as the days passed on.

Our discussion of this subject was cut short by the terrier's leaping from the stand and flying to the open door wherein an unsteady figure presently appeared. This figure was that of Rodge Peake, very much crumpled as to his shirt and over-alls, and very blurred as to his face. He grasped the side of the door, made a movement that was meant to cause us to think he was very

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upright indeed, then he asked solicitously concerning our health. Before we could reply, he told us earnestly that the Brant was the place for women, and he 'd got a house there that he 'd sell reasonable. Having said this he went down in a heap on the floor, with the dog flying about him. We heard a mutter to the effect that some strong coffee was what he needed, for his nerves sometimes played him these tricks. We acted upon this suggestion and began to make a fire as the first step toward coffee. We immediately suspected that Mr. Peake had been asleep on the dike somewhere ever since we had been informed that he had been "swillin' whiskey," and that, for some reason, his wife had not chosen to come after him. Mr. Peake drew himself up and leaned in a sitting posture against the wall just within the door. As the aroma of coffee grew strong upon the air our guest began to revive, and when he had drank one cup and held the other in his hand he was almost himself. He had probably slept off the first and deepest effects of his potations. He was now looking rather shamefaced, and this look grew upon him rapidly. He commenced an elaborate explanation of the

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tricks his nerves would at certain periods "cut upon him." He said that folks, to look at him, p'raps, would n't say he had a nerve in him, but, in point of fact, he was as chock full of um as a woman, and when he 'd been out in the hot sun, settin' on his merchine like 's he 'd been doin' on our dike, why, then he jest had ter give up 'n' lay down right where he was. He had often found it mighty inconvenient to have this kind of nerves, 'n' when he kinder come to, he hed to hev some coffee to stiddy him. He could feel this coffee a stiddyin' of him now.

As the fire blazed in the stove the atmosphere in the little room grew unbearable. It was one of the sultriest nights of the summer. The heavy clouds had shut out the sky all day, but no rain had fallen. There was not a breath of wind, and the flat lay there as if under a spell woven by the summer solstice, still, dark, hot, close. There was hardly a murmur from the ocean. The clouds kept coming down nearer and nearer. Off in the north "heat lightning" played along the horizon. But there was no thunder. It was what is called "muggy."

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Mr. Grant, when we had taken our daily allowance of milk at sunset, had said it could n't be no muggier if it tried.

We were constantly wiping the moisture from our faces, but Mr. Peake did not seem to mind the drops that rolled down his forehead and cheeks. He sat as comfortably as was possible in the door-way, his back propped against one side of the casing.

He took another sip of coffee and repeated with still more emphatic gratitude his assertion concerning its beneficial effects. As he did so a pathetic, long-drawn-out voice outside said,

"It's a great pity you could n't be at home to git stiddied under your own roof, 'n' let your own wife make your coffee."

The dog dashed out and conducted into the shanty a slender, young-looking woman of the washed-out blond type, who went to Mr. Peake and put her hand on his forehead as she looked anxiously at him. Then she glanced at us and said in a whisper that he was just a trifle feverish now. She 'd take him right home 'n' nuss him up. When he had these 'tacks they gen'rally lasted about three days. She knew

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how to take care of him. If there was ever a woman that knew about nerve 'tacks she was that woman, for her husband had had um ever sence she married him. She knew he was liable to um when he was on the merchine. She should have been after him sooner only she'd been spendin' the day jest below the Cut and did n't git the word 'til late. Virginy she had n't come home yet; 'n' Leife he was to Boston on business. It happened so she was the one to come. 'N' 't was 'jest as well, for she knew better 'n anybody how to do at such times.

“Come, Rodge, don't you think we can walk home now? I guess we can git there somehow?”

Her minor, drawling tones were very penetrating. Though she held on to the sound of some letters the effect was very different from the effect when the same thing was done in the full, melodious voice of her niece. Her face was sympathetic and gentle. There was not a hint in her whole aspect to show that she was not sincere, or that she could detect the fumes of whiskey which her husband's breath made

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very perceptible, even above the odor of coffee in the little room.

Mr. Peake looked at his wife and then at us with an air of pride. He struggled up to his feet with her help. As they stood together for a moment before starting, that he might be allowed to get his equilibrium as much as possible, it occurred to us that nerve attacks were very antagonistic to celerity in the matter of mowing. We inquired when our grass would probably all be cut. Mr. Peake looked at his wife again, now with inquiry. She explained that her husband wa' n't well for 'bout three days after one of these 'tacks. She thought by Monday he 'd be sure to be 'round. Rodge nodded his head profusely and said that by Monday he 'd be sure to be 'round. We said we wished we could get another man who did not have nerve 'tacks. Mrs. Peake did not appear offended at this. She said that dike grass bein' low so it would n't take no hurt if it stood a great deal later than upland. We knew that this was true, fortunately for us, and we knew also that "another man" would not probably be forthcoming at this late day. Mrs. Peake thanked us with

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almost tearful earnestness for our kindness to her sick husband. She said nerves was fearful things, and no one who had never had to deal with um knew anything about them. Then they both said good night, Mr. Peake turning back to repeat the farewell with fervor when a few yards away. We stood and watched the two as they walked slowly under the summer heavens. Even in the dusk we could see with what tenderness Mrs. Peake guided her companion. Did she know what his trouble was? She must know. But certainly I had never seen acting so perfect, and I was sure it was kept up in the privacy of their own home.

The night was so soft and sweet and still that we walked out on the dike. The scent of cedar and sweet fern and clover came out strongly in the dampness. There was not a distinct sound to be heard. The never-ceasing hum of the insects in the grass was like the inarticulate voice of the night itself. How dark it was! How hot!

There was no glimmer of light when we looked above. That heat lightning capriciously glared every few moments.

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Looking back we saw the light streaming from the door of our small black shanty and revealing the rough interior.

Without thinking or caring which way we went, we found that we had come near the river, which cuts its way through the marshes here, and makes a thoroughfare used in coming from the Brant village or going to it.

As we stood listening to the slight noise made by the stream, we presently became aware that there was a boat approaching. The oars were dipped and withdrawn very slowly. A man was speaking, and soon there were distinct words audible.

"It is lucky for me that you strayed over to the village. If you had gone directly home, I should not have met you, and so could n't have taken you across the cut. And there's a good mile you will have to walk with me yet."

The speaker evidently meant what he said, though he might have purposely exaggerated his emphasis. We were at first in doubt as to who he was. But we knew directly whose was the vowel-caressing voice that responded.

"You have an impressive way with you,

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cousin Leife. It makes conversation very pleasant — if one believes you,” and Miss Vance laughed.

“If one believes me!” rather vehemently repeated Leife Peake. “I don’t know you very well yet, but I mean to know you. Yes, I mean to understand you, you puzzle of a Northern and Southern girl in one. I’m going to stay right at home and study Virginia Vance. Tell me, are you intending to make the study a difficult one?”

“Just as difficult as possible, or you won’t care to keep on with it,” the girl answered gayly.

I cannot tell what it was, — surely nothing in the words, and we could not see her face, — was it something in the mere inflection, or more intricate or occult still, was it some involuntary revealment from her very presence that made us two outsiders who heard her equally sure that she was drawn toward her companion as he was drawn toward her?

He should have been conscious of this assurance far more acutely than we, who, standing without, could too vividly imagine the thrill the knowledge would give him.

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After a silence Miss Vance suggested that as they were so near those ladies, would it not be a good thing to call on them?

Hearing this proposition we turned quickly and hurried toward the lamp-light, which told us where the shanty was.

* Orlando, who had been on one of the mysterious trips which dogs often find it necessary to take, now came running back and began to bark at the boat. We did not reveal our presence by calling him.

We entered our hovel and sat down to wait. It was a good while, considering the distance, before the two appeared at the entrance. They did not seem eager to come in, but the girl entered and sat down, while her escort lounged in the door-way.

If there had been something like stolidity in the squareness of young Peake's face, there was nothing like it now. It was dangerously illuminated and alive. The aggressive chin and mouth were almost sensitive in their expression, and there was a sort of flush showing through the tan of his cheeks. That flush and the gleam in his eyes reminded me by contrast of the sod-

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den condition in which I had just seen his father, and it also made me think of the insinuations Mar Baker had spoken. What had this fellow been doing in Boston? Had he been drinking champagne with a gay party while his father had been enacting a more advanced part in the same drama? And was he going to love this girl and win her without being worthy even to be her friend?

Here I glanced at Miss Vance, and was made quite unhappy because I fancied she looked too happy. There was little color in her face, however. She had that pallor which often goes with dark skins, and which saves the owner many an agony of blushing. She met my eyes radiantly. She was more quiet even than usual. I could not, after the two were gone, forget a way she had of lifting her eyes slowly toward Leife, without smiling, but with something in her face a great deal better than a smile.

When they were well out of the way I declared that it was a shame. Without asking what I meant, my companion reiterated my exclamation.

After this, the closeness being still intolerable,

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we went out again. It was that kind of air, or lack of it, which makes people sure they cannot breathe if there is n't a change.

We went up on to the road till we came to Mrs. Baker's. We found her sitting on her doorstep flapping a bunch of sweet fern to keep away the mosquitoes. She said it was so hot 'n' stifled she jest hated to stay in the house. Her way of speaking showed that she was very tired, and when we questioned her she acknowledged that 'Zias had been particularly wearin' that day, and now he was asleep she was trying to rest. She ended by saying : —

“ I guess I ain't the only woman that 's fagged out to-night. Miss Peake jes' come along lookin' for her husband. She was as worked up 's could be ; said he 'd git cold a layin' on the dike. Said he had to lay down wherever he was when his nerve 'tack got to jes' such a haith ” — did she mean height ? — “ Said he was so liable to have a 'tack when he was on the merchine. I s'pose she found him, for I seen um go 'long jes' now.”

We related the occurrences of the last hour, so far as they concerned Mr. and Mrs. Peake.

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It seemed best to suppress all reference to the younger people we had seen. The little woman threw up her hands and exclaimed: "Lord-er-mighty! I never seen such a woman's that is! It's ben like that ever since she married. There ain't no mortal person ever known of her showing by any sign or look or word that she knows Rodge drinks. He's even had delirium trimmins once or twice. She talks 'bout his 'tacks free enough. She wishes her husband was well like other men. She nusses him up. She's gentle as a dove. She beats me. I've wondered many a time if she ever lets him know she knows what's the matter of him. I'll bet she don't. Does she know herself? I tell you she's bright's a dollar 'bout everything else. She knows. Sometimes I feel a respect for her, 'n' then I'm so kinder tried I want to go right to her 'n' tell her that Rodge gits drunk. But I never did, 'n' I don't think nobody ever did. What's the use? She's got her trials. Yes, we all have our trials, but I often think I'd know what I should do with a husband that had nerve 'tacks. I ain't fitted for that kind er trouble."

X

REMINISCENCES OF JOEL

IT may be remembered that July Burns threatened to come over and teach us how to make "bumonge." We thought that perhaps fate would kindly allow her to forget that intention. But, no, she was here this morning. Again it has been a warm, sultry dog-day and we were glad to let the fire go out in our stove, and had decided that we would rather eat bread and milk for our dinner than prepare anything more elaborate. We were in our sitting-room, which is on the shady side of the shanty. The locality naturally varies with the sun. We were too tired even to read. It was at such a time that we saw Mrs. Burns coming across the dike, and again she bore with her a tin quart measure and a paper bag. It was hard to think that now, whether we would or not, we should be obliged to learn how to make "bumonge."

Reminiscences of Joel

The sound of the mowing machine was once more in the air, and Mr. Peake himself was enthroned upon the machine. His son was turning and tossing the cut grass with two other men. The father assured us that he never had two nerve “'tacks” very nigh together; therefore our spirits were high in the hope that now our grass would soon be cut, cured, and stored.

But there was Mrs. Burns. Truly, trials are ever present. When she had waddled up to a speaking distance she told us that we looked as cool and comfort’ble as cucumbers. Why is a cucumber chosen as the vegetable synonyme of comfort? She informed us that she had left her young man fast asleep after a very wakeful night, during which she had hardly had a minute’s peace.

“I tell him,” she said, sitting down heavily, “that I guess no trained nuss would n’t be broke of her rest’s I be — hm-m-m, no, not as I be. ’N’ I told him I should git somebody to watch with him to-night so’s I could make up my sleep some. I ’m er goin’ ter send word to Virginy Vance ter come. He’s er perkin’ up won-

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derful like. I guess he wa' n't hurt's much's he pertended; 'n' I guess too, he'll find out we know er thing er two down here, 'f we don't live in er city, hm-m-m — er city."

Here she passed instantly into a state of deep meditation, having put her measure of milk on the ground beside her, where it would have been immediately examined by the terrier had we not forcibly prevented such examination. My friend, after looking at our guest for some moments in silence, proposed that we run away during this attack of meditation on the part of July Burns, and thus escape learning how to make "bumonge." But I had not the moral courage to do it. I was afraid of offending Mrs. Burns, and I knew that the whole hamlet would take offence through her. As it was, I had a stinging conviction that nearly all the people near felt a mild and pitying contempt for us, arising, I think, on the part of the men in the fact that we, as females, were not justified in getting in our own grass. On the part of the women, I fancy the contempt sprang up because we had no masculine protectors, and had taken up with a "pesky long-haired dog" for lack of any-

Reminiscences of Joel

thing better. And we read too many novels. You may have noticed that among this kind of people everything one reads is a novel. "Daniel Deronda" and a story by Mrs. Southworth are classed under one head, and you would be foolish indeed if you tried to show the difference between these two writers. I fell into such imbecility once, and after having made some remarks which I thought very clear on this subject to Mrs. Baker, she looked at me sharply and asked if all them books I'd ben talkin' 'bout wa'n't novels. She shut her mouth after having said she thought so, and added that she had been brought up to believe a novel was a novel; there wa'n't any of them true. Subsequently I learned that she had read one such work in early girlhood. This work was T. S. Arthur's "The Maid, Wife, and Mother." This may have been considered by her parents as too stimulating to the mental faculties, for it was the last one. "To spend your time a-readin'" puts you in a low place among such people. You might better be counting beans from one hand to the other, or sit absolutely idle in mind and body. And yet

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they were kind, and, being among them, I cared somewhat for their good opinion. So we did not run away from Mrs. Burns, though greatly tempted to do so.

As it turned out, we were not compelled to take any lessons in cooking this time, for when Mrs. Burns roused herself she seemed disinclined to stir. She said she would leave the moss and milk, and we might try it again, "with a little more jedgment as to moss."

She was sitting in our best camp-chair and I think she found it very comfortable, for she did not move. She said her young man had just taken some morfeen the doctor had left for him, and as it was a kind of a stiff dose she guessed he would n't need her for a good while.

She seemed disposed to recall memories of her earlier life, particularly memories concerning her courtship and marriage. We had heard rumors that Joel Burns was a poor thing in every way, and that his wife "had had her trials." He had been dead several years now, and his widow had not visibly pined under the affliction.

She now sat, inclining forward as was her custom, her heavy cheeks looking heavier than

Reminiscences of Joel

ever as the day, warm and sweet, began to deepen toward noon. There was a shrill and incessant noise of crickets on the air, and the sound of the machine was constantly coming near and then receding, as Mr. Peake drove round our dike.

I saw Mrs. Burns's pale, inexpressive eyes wander over the scene. She hitched slightly in her chair, and then said that, somehow, August days made her think of Joel. Then she looked at us and asked if we ever seen Joel; she s'posed we had n't. No, we had never seen him. And neither of us had never been married neither, she thought likely. We reluctantly shook our heads in the negative. She thought so; folks had told her we had n't been able to ketch nobody.

"Wall, wall," with a slow shake of her head, "I've been thinkin' of Joel mighty strong all day."

She continued shaking her head and looking so retrospective that she was asked some question concerning Mr. Burns. She was undisguisedly grateful for the chance to go on talking about him. She said she had married Joel in August

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and had buried him in August, and she did n't know as folks could think it strange if she thought of him in August. We told her that folks must be very unreasonable who could think strange of anything like that.

“Ee-us, it does seem so; ee-us, it does,” she said. “But folks is peculiar, as you ’ll find. ’Cause Joel was n't all he should be, it don't foller that I should n't think of him; no, it don't.”

Our silence assented to this remark. After a moment she went on, with a slightly apologetic manner, speaking in her slow way:—

“I wa'n't much acquainted with Joel when I merried him, though he 'd been workin' round in the neighborhood, choppin' wood. He told me he had a chance to take a farm where there was an old man and woman. He 'd work the farm, and he 'd bring his mother over, and if I 'd merry him his mother 'd help do the work and they 'd all keep the house. He never told me his circumstances, but I told him mine. I told him I was poor, my father and mother was poor, and I had n't no relative but what was poor. I was in hopes he 'd tell me his circum-

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stances ; but I was led to believe he had money, though he only said he was going to bring his mother over, and how could he bring her over if he had n't no money ? ”

We here interrupted to ask where the mother of Mr. Burns was then residing. We were told that she was to be brought “ over ” from Maine. We inwardly inquired why “ over,” instead of “ up,” for instance ; but we would not puzzle our friend with any such question, for we were entirely willing that the elder Mrs. Burns should be brought over from Maine. July went on : —

“ Some folks did say that he had a little house over there ” (in Maine). “ ’N’ he said to me, ‘ July, what do you want me to git for you to go to housekeepin’ with ? ’ Would n’t you er thought he ’d had money if he ’d said that to you ? ”

Mrs. Burns’s eyes were fixed on me as she unexpectedly put this question, and I was necessarily forced to try to imagine Joel Burns as asking me what he should get for me to go to housekeeping with. As soon as I could I answered that I should certainly have thought he

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had money to pay for household goods. Then Mrs. Burns resumed : —

“I don’t want to talk about Joel, but he had his failin’s. I told him that I was in the habit of gittin’ along with a very little. ’N’ I told him if I could have a bureau, three good chairs, cane-bottom, ’n’ what they used to call a toilet set, I could git ’long. But I did want a table. He went over to Rivertown ’n’ he ordered them things up, ’n’ they was good things, too. Now, what do you think? In six months’ time the storekeeper from Rivertown came up, ’n’ he handed the bill for them goods to my father. Joel had n’t no money. My father paid the bill, ’n’ we started agin, outer debt. He brought his mother over. We had to go to housekeepin’ together. I did let her wash dishes a few times. Wall, hm-m-m, wall, she was a curious woman, Joel’s mother was. She wa’n’t neat. I could n’t stand it. Joel was always good to her. But I never spent a cent of Joel’s money while we lived together; ’n’ he used to have consid’-able in his pocket sometimes, when he ’d been to work on stone, a blarstin’ ’n’ a gittin’ out stone for underpinnin’ ’n’ pos’s. But, you

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know, after a little, work slacked. He'd worked up the rocks round there, you see. They said he was a marster hand at blarstin'. He could calkilate 'bout the right amount er powder for the kind er stone he wanted. Ee-us, everybody said he was a marster hand at blarstin'. But he couldn't do much but blarst, which made it inconvenient when the rocks were gone. So there wa'n't nothin' left but farmin', 'n' choppin' wood winters.

"I did have eighty dollars when I merried him. I let him have five to a time, and never arst him for it. He had the rent to pay and victuals to git. Finally he brought over Ruth, his sister. Then he brought over Nancy, another sister. They was both widders. 'N' his sister that married a Brett was with us a good deal. Nancy was a poor, sickly thing, and we had to keep her in victuals. Wall, 't wa'n't always pleasant at our house. No, it wa'n't."

These accumulating memories were very vivid and of a nature to tend to make us resigned to the fact that we "had n't ben able to ketch nobody." Mrs. Burns paused a moment in her retrospect, and I was afraid she was going

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to meditate. The sun was creeping round the corner of the shanty, and we must change our sitting-room. But July did not meditate. She was thinking of her sisters-in-law.

“Ee-us,” she went on. (It has, I hope, been perceived that this was her way of saying “yes.”) “Ee-us, Nancy’s folks had flour outer our barrel for a whole year. The time come when we did n’t have nothin’ in the house. ’T was ’bout this time that Joel said he guessed he’d go over to Maine ’n’ git a jorb er stone. ’N’ he went with his stone tools, ’n’ he promised me he’d write soon ’s he got there. I waited seven weeks, ’n’ then I wrote to a friend of his’n, arsking if Joel was livin’. Instid of arnserin’ my letter, up he comes, ’n’ then I found he’d hired him land ’n’ planted him a garden, ’n’ hired a housekeeper. ‘Now,’ says he, ‘that I ’m here’ — calm as a clock — ‘I guess I’ll let myself a-hayin’.’ And he did let himself to Cobbett, that owns the next dike to yourn. I said to him: ‘Joel, you hain’t no clo’es nor nothin’.’ You see he’d left all his things over there in Maine, his trunk ’n’ all. He sold his stone tools to come home with. I

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went to work 'n' I hunted him up some old clo'es, 'n' I patched um, 'n' he wore um. He earned some money hayin', but I never seen a cent of it."

Here came another pause. Mrs. Burns's flabby face was flushed and covered with perspiration, whether from the heat or from the power of bygone times I could not tell. She tried to rouse herself.

"So it went on year by year. Joel was always a gittin' into such scrapes. One time he got a lame white horse in Rivertown, 'n' he traded that horse for a tin peddler's horse 'n' give him 'leven dollars to boot. Then he wa'n't satisfied till he had traded that animil for one with the awfulest spring halt you ever seen. And he had n't no use for a horse, anyway. Wall, hm-m-m. He's dead 'n' gone, 'n' I don't want to talk about him. He had his failin's. If he'd only consulted me sometimes, we'd er got 'long better. If folks 'd known how 't was they would n't wondered we were so poor. What become of the little house they said he had over in Maine? Oh, he never had none.

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“Here I have been a settin’ ’n’ talkin’. But these August days do bring Joel up so plain. I must be a-gittin’ back to see how that morfeen’s a workin’ on my young man. ’N’ I’m goin’ up to Mar Baker’s to see if she’ll send ’Zias over to tell Virginy Vance I want her to help me watch ter night.”

We volunteered to go up to Mrs. Baker’s and save her that walk, for walking seemed to be a kind of locomotion almost beyond the powers of her unwieldy frame. She said she should thank us kindly, for she wa’n’t so spry as she wished she was.

She went her way over the dike toward Mrs. Grant’s, and while we watched her and thought of what she had been telling us, Orlando succeeded in eating part of the milk that was to have helped to make bumonge.

XI

HELPING MRS. BURNS WATCH

IT appeared that Ozias must have done his errand faithfully, for the next morning while we were brewing our coffee "Virginy" appeared at the door of the shanty. She looked tired, but she spoke no more lingeringly than usual.

She said the odor of the coffee had tempted her to stop, for "she'd ben er watchin' with July Burns's young man," and the young man had kept her waiting upon him to a fatiguing extent.

Mrs. Burns had explained his excessive irritability by saying that his bones was er knittin', 'n' when er man's bones was knittin' he was justified in wearin' his nusses into the grave.

In addition to the patient, Miss Vance had had Mrs. Burns on a lounge snoring in so deafening and persistent a manner as to greatly confuse the girl, who had come near putting an

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end to the life of her charge by giving him to drink of the lotion for a bruise in place of the potion that was meant for internal healing. It was only because the young man was so very wide awake and so keenly critical that the mistake was discovered in time.

“I had poured a wine glass of the stuff,” said Miss Vance, as she discriminatingly sipped her coffee, “and he swallowed some of it, and cried out ‘the devil’ in such a terrible way that I quite jumped, — then he tasted again and told me that that infernal imp of a nurse must have put the bottles wrong. I assured him that I must be the imp he meant, for I had poured it out of a certain tall vial, which I went and brought with the lamp that we might examine. Anything was better than waking Mrs. Burns, even if I could have wakened her.

“When I had the little kerosene hand-lamp I looked at the bottle, and exclaimed in a great fright, for the label read ‘Lotion — to be rubbed on the bruises.’ I supposed I had poisoned Mrs. Burns’s young man.

“Evidently while I examined the lotion, he examined me, and it was the first time he had

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had a chance to see me, except in the dusk, for I had the lamp shaded on a table at the end of the room.

“As he looked at me he raised himself a trifle on his pillow. He groaned and fell back and said ‘the devil’ again. Whereupon he begged my pardon and explained that he did n’t feel inclined to say anything but the devil, and he wanted to say that all the time, for it was the only phrase that, in his circumstances, expressed anything.

“I answered him that it was very evident that he felt an inclination to make that remark, and that, as far as I was concerned, he might continue making it all night. If it relieved him any I was glad of it. He said it did n’t relieve him any, but he hoped every time that it would. Nothing relieved him, he went on, groaning again.

“Then he bethought himself to say that, if anything could soothe his pain it would be the presence of so charming a young lady.

“Here I thanked him, and said that he might better stick to his former remark, and that he was too ill to try compliments on his watcher.

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“All this time I had been holding the lamp and the lotion bottle. Now I took away the glass I had given him, saying, as cheerfully as I could, that I was like a doctor, for doctors frequently gave the wrong medicine.

“He hastened to respond that it was no matter, — that any medicine from my hands, etc. I told him again that he was not well enough to try to flirt.

“He replied to this by saying that if I would give him any encouragement that I would allow him even to mildly flirt with me when he got well, the thought would be the greatest inducement, and so on. I tell you it was all very droll.”

Here the girl paused and smiled down into her coffee cup as she remembered the last few hours.

“And did you give him the encouragement?” asked my friend.

Miss Vance looked up with a whimsical expression on her face. I could hardly tell whether she really meant what she said as she replied.

“Of course I did. One must indulge the

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notions of people who are ill, you know, and I don't suppose he was very sincere. I promised him that he should not lack the incentive, that is, if he should survive the taking of the stuff I had given him. I then administered the proper medicine. I suffered all night for fear I should detect some symptom caused by my mistake. He was very wakeful for a good while, and he would converse. He informed me that he had never dreamed of seeing a person like me in a little sea-coast village."

She gave her mellow laugh as she said this.

"I reckon he meant such a remark to be taken as a compliment. I let him know that there were often people superior even to me found in New England towns. He said he could not believe it; he did not know much about New England, but he could not believe that.

"He made me get the lamp and put it where he could see me. He said he felt like talking, and it was embarrassing to talk to a person whom you could not see. When he did not talk he stared. I was so anxious all the time about the little he had taken from that glass that very likely I indulged him more than I ought. Do you

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think I indulged him more than I ought? Do you think it was wrong to allow him to talk when he should have been trying to sleep?"

Miss Vance put her spoon in her cup and looked apprehensively at us. We hardly knew what to say, and only made some kind of a murmur. She went on.

"I never saw any one so wide-awake as he was. Can you fancy me sitting there near his bed, with the lamp in my hand, listening to him? His eyes looked so large and his face so interested that I grew very nervous as I watched for some sign to tell me I had poisoned him. I tried to think of antidotes for different poisons. I resolved, if he showed the least sign of anything, I would get the whites of a good many eggs and make him swallow them. I looked forward to my feelings in the future if he should die because of what I had given him. It was a great consolation to see that he did not look in the least like dying.

"After I had sat thus holding the lamp for an hour, I thought I had done enough, even for a sick man whose death I was afraid I had hastened.

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“It was terribly close, and the lamp made it worse. I carried it to the stand and shaded it. I was going to remain there. He begged me to come and fan him. I did so; but I forbade him to speak another word. I could see his eyes gleaming as I leaned over him. By this time I felt quite as if he were an old acquaintance. I wonder if all men are so childish when they are ill. He would n’t let me move away. You see, I had to be very gentle, because he was ill, and because I was n’t sure yet whether I had killed him or not.”

“Perhaps you were too gentle,” here interrupted my friend, with what seemed an unnecessary earnestness.

The girl looked at the speaker in astonishment. She answered that she supposed that one could n’t be too gentle at such a time, as we should know if we were ever in like circumstances.

She resumed:—

“But I was firm about not talking. Now that we were silent, Mrs. Burns became more audible than before, or we had a better chance to hear her.

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“It didn’t seem to me so much snoring as a kind of bellowing. She lay on a lounge in the room. The lounge was drawn across an open window, so that if there should be a breeze, she would feel it. Her young man had told me, before I interdicted talking, that Mrs. Burns breathed all the air there was first, and he thought it confounded hard that he should have to breathe second-hand air, and sometimes he had felt as if he would stop breathing anyway ; and he would have done it long ago if she would have been annoyed. He asked me if she had ever told me about Joel and his mother that he brought over from Maine, and her sister that married a Brett. When I said no, he said I didn’t know how lucky I was, for he knew all about ’em ; in fact, he didn’t know much else, and he didn’t see how he could, considering how often he had heard their history. I see you know,” and she paused while we all laughed.

“As Mrs. Burns retired to her couch, after I came last evening, she told me she was ‘goin’ ter lop ri’ down there so ’s ter be handy ’f I wanted her ;’ and she added in a loud whisper,

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which Mrs. Grant might have heard in the kitchen, that if there was any change I must be sure 'n' call her. She said he seemed better, but nothin' was so deceivin' as appearances, and she was always on the watch for a change at 'bout the turn of the night.

"Are you tired of my little story?" asked the girl.

Perhaps our faces assured her of our interest, for she went on, —

"I have n't much more to tell. The poor fellow fell asleep while I was fanning him. He was in the midst of a profound slumber, and I was almost dreaming myself, when Mrs. Burns began to make a yet stronger noise than any she had perpetrated. While I was on my way to her to arouse her, she sat bold upright, and screamed 'fire!' enough to move a block of stone. It was all I could do not to scream also. I jumped at her, and did n't spare her. I heard the sick man swearing in his bed, and in a moment Mr. Grant came fumbling through the entry to the open door.

"I explained that Mrs. Burns had had a nightmare. Mrs. Burns further made it clear

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in a very aggrieved tone, that she 'never had no nightmare 'less she was wore out. She could n't remember when she'd ben so wore out by anybody's she'd been by that critter that was cussin' on the bed there. If it had n't ben for him she should n't dreamt of fire 'n' routed herself up, when she needed all the rest she could git.'

"Mr. Grant muttered something about other folks needing rest too, and shuffled away again.

"Long before I had ceased trembling from the start I had received, Mrs. Burns was snoring again, and our patient was asleep almost as soon. You see what an adventurous night I have had. Do you wonder I wanted some coffee, and to tell you all about my first watching? After the nightmare the hours passed quietly. Did you know when the fog cleared and the wind came out east? It was wonderful. Just before daylight I heard a strange moan as if from some giant far out at sea there."

The girl rose and walked to the door of the shanty, looking off across the flat which now lay beneath a brilliant sun, for the "muggy-spell" had cleared without any rain. Nothing brought rain of late.

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Her profile was in the clear light. It was in seeing her thus, possibly, that one could know more in detail why her face was so charming. Its very darkness was a charm ; its very irregularity, which defied rules, was another charm. Let me be contradictory, and say with sweeping inclusiveness that it was not her face at all ; it could not have been ; but that it was herself—her personality, her “atmosphere” —that held a certain allurements as indescribable as it was real, and of which she was evidently entirely ignorant.

“You did not know when the wind changed?” she asked, still with her eyes on the flat. “You missed a great deal. I have to thank Mrs. Burns for not waking at three as she said she would, and taking my place. Everybody in the house seemed sound asleep at about four. My patient was resting so well that I crept out of the house. Even then it was suffocating, and there was a thick gray mist everywhere. For all the sound the ocean made it might have been a thousand miles away. I was tired. Now that I felt sure that I had n’t poisoned any one, I was feeling limp with the

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reaction from my tense state. I really would have liked to cry from sheer relief. I'm not sure that I did not weep a very little as I stood alone out there at the end of the house. You see I had had no coffee then. Although I had no wrap on I was warm. All at once, over there," she lifted a hand, "something seemed to draw a long sobbing breath, and the whole fog felt that breath and made a curious little movement. I began to be cold. I crept in and took Mrs. Burns's great blanket shawl and went out again with it huddled about me. I felt as if the great out-of-doors would show me something if I were only there to see; and it did. But how can I tell? It is still new to me, this being on the coast," she said as if in apology. "The very scent of the salt water makes me happy," she drew a deep breath, "and these great flats, — there is not a spear of grass, nor a grasshopper on them that I don't love; Uncle Peake says I am 'marked.' Since I came here there has something stirred in my blood, — some kind of a new life; it is the salt wind and the ocean and these marshes, — they all tell me I am my mother's daughter."

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She still spoke deliberately, but with a certain intensity I had never noticed in her before.

Soon with a slight movement of her head and shoulders she banished this mood which might reveal too much.

“That first chill was the first breath of a clear east wind, — not one which brings mist, but one which dispels it. The fog felt it quicker than I did, and wavered before it. Presently I heard a rush of wings over my head and saw the white breasts of some gulls as they flew above me. How white those feathers looked in the grayness which now began to grow luminous! The morning was coming in from the sea. It is the sea, you know, which sends us each new day. It comes in splendor over that lustrous water for leagues and leagues, growing brighter and brighter until it is one unutterable glory.”

She ceased speaking and looked at us with a kind of shy deprecation of her enthusiasm upon her face.

“Do not laugh at me,” she said. Then, more assuredly, “But you will not. You would not have come to live on the dike if you had not known what I have been talking about.

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You should have seen the thick fog grow thin and quiver, and undulate, long ribbons of it shining like a diaphanous silver robe which the night was casting aside. I never saw a fog ripple before, but this did so when the wind grew a bit stronger. Presently a level bar of sunshine touched it and the breeze grew stronger at the same moment. The gauze of the fog was flung off in long scrolls that trembled and lingered here and there, but very soon there stood the naked day in the cloudless sunshine, lusty, and strong, and glorious. How the birds flew! How sweet the wind was! How the sand cliffs sparkled! Over there where there are no cliffs, I could see the very topmost sail of a ship.

“In a few minutes more, as the clock in the kitchen struck five, I heard Mr. Grant jingle the milk-pail against the door as he started for the barn. He was not more than half awake, and he came out stretching, followed by the cat who was stretching too. When he saw me he nodded and said he hoped Miss Burns rested well, for if she did n’t, he was sorry for the young feller, and how was I myself?

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“When I went back, the house was still close and warm, but the wind swept it cool when I set open an east window.

“Neither the patient nor his nurse wakened until a short time ago, and then I came away. But I promised Mr. Ross I would call there before night. You knew his name is Ross? He said what I had given him might be rather of a slow poison, and it would be only humane for me to come and see how he bore it. I think he will bear it very well, much better than I could bear being nursed by July Burns.

“If there is any coffee left I will have that lovely china cup half full, thank you. I am so glad you had to take some dike land for debt, otherwise I could never have had this divine coffee from a diviner cup.”

As I gave her the cream I said I supposed she would now be considered to have helped July Burns to watch.

“Yes. She will have the honor. It is a case of

‘The page slew the boare,
But the prince had the gloire.’”

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She set down her cup, smiled at us, said good-by, and sauntered out across the dike toward the road.

Have I recorded that when this girl smiled one was likely to have a permeating and pleasurable knowledge that she did so?

As she climbed the fence a man came rapidly along the road with a hay-fork and rake over his shoulder. He put down these implements and hastened to the girl's help. The two lingered a while, and when the man walked on to our dike and began turning hay we saw that it was Leife Peake. He was soon followed by his father and more men, and the work of hay-making was in full progress beneath a clear sky.

That afternoon when Mrs. Burns took what she called her "airin'" she waddled over to our shanty. She was extremely solemn. She said that Virginy Vance had cle-an bewitched that Ross feller. He was talkin' 'bout the gal all day, 'n' cussin' awful 'cause he was tied down to that bed.

"But, land's sake! He won't be tied down there long. I must say I do hate to see gals bold's brass. They did n't useter be so. Ye

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see I got her to help me watch. I was erwake three quarters of the time myself, but I s'pose when I did ketch er nap she jest talked 'n' talked. She 's got a kinder takin' way with her, ye know, 'n' I s'pose he kinder sensed it. He 's arst more questions 'bout her ter day than I c'n shake a stick at. Hm-m-m."

Mrs. Burns sighed and fell to meditating, as usual in our easiest chair, —sometimes it almost seemed as if she occupied that chair more than we did. *

XII

STOWING HAY WITH OZIAS

I HAD always supposed, until a recent experience, that riding on a load of hay was a pleasure which condensed nearly every joy of a free, sweet life in the country, and gave you a taste of them all at once. Now I think that riding a hay-load and riding a camel for the first time must greatly resemble each other in effect. We did this unaccustomed thing partly in the way of celebrating a great event, or rather a great consummation. Our grass is cut and cured and in the barn. When we go to our bunks to-night it will be as two conquering generals, who have overcome many difficulties, and who retire with an inebriating sense of victory. I don't know how great the sense of victory will be when we learn what we owe Rodge Peake, but to-day I do not feel like looking forward to that hour, for I have heard that often a success is as costly as a defeat.

Stowing Hay with Ozias

At half past three this afternoon Mr. Peake came to our door and said that they were going to begin on the last load, and would we like to come out and help stow it? The idea seemed to us a good one, and we hastily put on our broad hats and went across the hot flat in the direction of the collection of haycocks, accompanied by Mr. Peake, who, since his nerve 'tack, has been more genial and good-humored than ever. As we went on, crowds of grasshoppers flew up with every step we took in the stubble; flocks of small blackbirds were sweeping through the air in short flights, then settling on fences and savin trees out by the road.

When we had walked thus far, we saw Virginia up on the highway, and we signalled to her by a moving of rakes and forks. She came over the shaky fence in a very dexterous manner, and soon joined us. We explained to her the nature of the treat in prospect, and she was more than willing to share our experience, whatever it should prove. She nodded at Leife, as if she had but recently parted from him.

There was scarcely any breeze, and what there was came from the east, and brought with

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it a sound of waves and an odor of salt. It was rare and pleasant on the dike as we went on, the terrier starting up a good many grasshoppers on his own account, as he careered here and there ahead of us. Noticing the birds, Mr. Peake said he always felt as if fall was about here when he saw them, and that he ought to be gittin' in his winter coal. Then he turned to us and said, he hoped we'd 'scuse him for callin' us out on false pretences, as it were; but the fact was, Mar Baker's idjit had come onto the dike a little while ago, and he had ben raisin' Cain 'bout ridin' on the load, and Mr. Peake did n't feel as if he could be responsible if 'Zias did ride, and did fall off.

"It's 'nough for me, 'n' more than Mar Baker will ever forgive, that I chopped off small bits of 'Zias's toes when I could n't help it. There he is."

Yes, there was Ozias looming up at the other side of the cart. He was raking furiously after; and he had an air about him as if he had run away, and did n't care if he had. He hung his head and would not look at me when I asked him if he remembered that his mother had for-

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bidden him to work haying. He said he guessed his mar did n't know everything, and he guessed his mar had forgot that he was bigger 'n she was, anyway.

"That's the way he is to-day," whispered Mr. Peake by my side. "And you can't do a thing with him. He's continually gittin' behind that off horse, 'n' she kicks like thunder when she's a mind to. I'm free to say that I can't tend to my work; it just makes me sweat to look at him. Can't you coax him home, Virginy?"

Even Miss Vance, who sometimes had influence with the boy, had no influence with him now. He stuck out his lips and wagged his head in a way that made one want to shake him.

Perhaps it is only a wise man who will allow himself to be coaxed; certain it is that this fool was proof against all our pleading, and all the bribes we could offer him in the hope that he would go home. He did waver a little when we promised to take him to the Brant, and give him unlimited ice-cream; but he withstood even that seduction, and went on raking. At Mr.

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Peake's suggestion, one of the men went up on to the road to Mar Baker's house, to find it locked. Then we were sure that Mrs. Baker had gone away, and equally sure, knowing her never-failing and anxious care for her son, that she believed she had arranged for his safety, but that he had brought such plans to naught. Impossible to get any information from Ozias. If we asked him a question he would either laugh or sulk.

"Let us take him on the load with us," said my friend; and we did so, finding that stowing hay on a cart and riding on it were occupations dear to the soul of Ozias.

I know that we were at a great disadvantage in judging of the pleasures of being on a load of hay in that we had Ozias with us to share those pleasures. He was so alert and so active, and was so constantly on the point of falling off, and resented so strongly our efforts to keep him from pitching over the side, that the next hour was an hour of agony to us, and one we shall remember with terror all our lives.

Virginia, who does not have what we New England people call "nerves," was tortured

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with us in view of the fate which must eventually befall Ozias if we were not alert to the pitch of panic.

She shared all our struggles to keep him in safety. She was roused to a greater physical activity than I had ever seen her manifest before. She plunged here and there after Mar Baker's son with such reckless zeal for his welfare as called forth warning protests from Leife Peake, whose work on the hay seemed to demand that he should be in close proximity to the cart, and to the side of the cart where Virginia happened to be. As she varied her position with bewildering frequency, it appeared to me, when I glanced down, that young Peake was suffering almost as much from anxiety on the ground as we were from the same emotion on the load. But alarm concerning an imbecile, who you feel needs corporeal punishment, and alarm in regard to the woman who has enthralled your fancy, are two widely different sensations, entailing quite different results.

Hitherto I had had no idea that there were such violent lurchings, such seasick rockings, such pitchings to and fro, incident to being on a

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load of hay. The very breathing of the horses seemed to vibrate all through the hay ; and when a big forkful came up and we essayed to trample it down in place, the almost absolute certainty that it would slip off, taking us with it, was dreadful to bear. All the time there was a kind of oscillating movement far down below us that made us think the marsh was getting ready to reel over to one side. There was no surety about anything ; the cart rocked, and each bunch of hay that was added increased the strange motion that pervaded the heap. I would have said that the hay was alive, and would presently heave us all out with vicious enjoyment of the catastrophe. I asked myself why it was that men whom I had seen riding by in such positions always presented a picture of dreamy happiness. Could it be that use and custom at length removed the conviction that the substance upon which they reposed was not a live, palpitating giant, who was only waiting a good opportunity to effect a wholesale destruction ? No matter where I was on the load there always seemed to be beneath me an incipient, sly kind of a movement that I was sure would result dreadfully to

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one or more of us. As the hay accumulated, this sensation, this all-absorbing suspicion of mine, increased also. Every moment made the prospective fall still higher. Added to my own private, personal fears as to my ultimate fate, was always the uncertainty concerning Ozias, who danced about over each increase of hay like a maniac over a volcano. I think he saw how anxious we were, and enjoyed our terrors. He laughed shrilly every time a big bundle of hay came tossing up, and rushed for it to trample it down. He had the appearance of being at an orgy of some kind, and his excitement grew as the pile increased. With every moment that passed, my resolution never again to be on a load of hay with Mar Baker's idjit, nay, with any idjit, increased in strength.

"Great fun, ain't it?" cheerily exclaimed Rodge Peake, as he led his horses toward the next row of cocks. "You've got a good crop of hay, too. Never seen no better. Look out, there! Don't let 'Zias come so near the aidge."

Yes, for the twentieth time in as many minutes Ozias was too near the "aidge." We were

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sitting deep down in what we hoped was the middle of the load, as we moved on, swaying and heaving and bumping, while great locks of hay rolled off on the ground on either side of us, and were gathered up by Leife, who now walked behind, and thrust back at the first opportunity.

The question about Ozias had by this time resolved itself in my mind into the simple interrogation, "Was I, or was I not, willing to sacrifice myself for him?" I was now convinced that, at the present rate of progression in danger on this load, either my friend, or Virginia, or Ozias, or I would lose life or limb within the next half-hour. It was precisely all we could do to preserve our own safety, but we must also preserve the safety of Ozias.

When Mr. Peake shouted that our charge was too near the "aidge," my friend and I had simultaneously thrown ourselves out at full length, and had succeeded in clutching Ozias, and in pulling him, struggling, back. But we were not always able to do this.

I called to Mr. Peake to let us get down, and he said the load was so high now we could n't anyways git down, unless somebody went some-

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where on the road and got a ladder ; he meant *ladder*. Did we think that was worth while ? No, we returned, it was not worth while. We could die where we were. We were sure that, when the hay was taken off in the barn, he would find three dead women, and one triumphant idiot. He thought this was a joke, and laughed heartily. It was an added torture to us to know that, no matter what happened now, we could not get down without a ladder. My prevailing sensation was akin to that which comes to one who dreams of falling down a precipice, and who cannot waken.

A dozen more hay-cocks were put on. We gave up trying to trample the hay in place, and did nothing but make lurches and clutches for Ozias, some of them effective fortunately. How far off and solemn sounded Orlando's bark from the ground ! He was getting excited as we rose higher and higher in the air ; I think he suspected that we were not happy, and sympathized with us. Besides, he was, perhaps, giving vent to his natural antipathy to our companion.

At last, after an unusually arduous rescue of

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Ozias, we simultaneously shouted to Rodge Peake. Virginia told him that it was absolutely necessary that we have a rope several yards in length. Something in her voice made Leife Peake start instantly on a run up to the barn. I knew that he was alarmed, because he did not stop to ask any questions. He returned at the same rapid pace, and at the very first fling the rope fell over the load so that we could reach it. We did as we had read is the custom among mountain travellers, who go in especially dangerous places. We fastened the rope about the waist of each person, thinking that, if we women exercised due caution, we should be able to resist by our combined weight all the freaks of Ozias, who, contrary to our expectation, seemed to think it quite a funny thing to have the cord secured upon him, and who now, strange to say, became instantly utterly averse to moving anywhere but in the very centre of the hay, where there was no danger of falling off. As soon as the rope was upon him he ceased to require any such safeguard. But we did not dare to take it off, and, thus hampered, we did all we could toward fulfilling the duty of "stowing."

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When at last we rode into the barn we realized that we were dripping with perspiration; that we had known nothing whatever of the fragrant odor of new-mown hay; that there had not been a particle of idyllic joy in the experience. And we knew that every pulse was bounding with heat, fatigue, and anxiety; the sense of gratitude when we really reached ground again was so profound that it swallowed up every other emotion. Orlando greeted us as if after a month's absence, and we responded as fervently. Thankfully we heard Mar Baker's shrill voice from the road calling to her son, who reluctantly obeyed, after having been disunited from the bond which had bound him to us for an unhappy space of time. It was dreadful to us to see that Ozias did not want to have the rope unfastened; dreadful to see that he wanted to remain tied to us. This union seemed funny to him and provocative of great laughter on his part.

We asked Miss Vance to return with us and help restore herself with a cup of cold tea. By cold tea we meant that it was not hot, only lukewarm from standing in a pitcher which had

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no ice in it and was near none. There are advantages in a shanty life, but cold beverages are not among them. We had found that tea of nearly blood heat was easier to drink than plain water of the same temperature. It was to this exhilarating tippie that we invited the girl.

When we wearily walked back over the dike to the shanty we talked sadly. We were glad the hay was in, but were sorry the ideal we had always cherished concerning riding on the load was hopelessly shattered. It is sorrowful to have illusions vanish.

We all sat on the shady side and drank tea, and fanned ourselves and looked off over the dike.

Suddenly there seemed a greater flurry than usual among the blackbirds. Great, white-winged fowl rose from toward the sea, and circled swiftly. The sun no longer shone and the east wind no longer blew. Without the least warning it had come on "muggy" again. There was a mutter of thunder in the west, a quick, almost pungent sweetness in the air.

Virginia rose and put on her hat. As she did so, Leife Peake came round from the barn.

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With the interest of two women who are only spectators, we watched the faces of these two.

Peake, without being silly at all, to an observer, was very evidently a man in love, and with the inevitable but now only partial fatuity of a man in love, he was confident that no one suspected the fact. The owner of that kind of a chin was not going to make a fool of himself. He could still shut his mouth firmly, and had not entirely lost control of his eyes.

He said he was afraid Virginia had not noticed that a tempest was threatening. If they started now they could get home across lots before it rained. They went away immediately. It did not seem to us that they moved as rapidly as was natural for people who were obliged to cross lots to shorten the distance. But it was not the girl's way to hasten. And as for him, why should one who had an opportunity of meeting her glance, now peculiarly soft, try to abridge those moments, even though a thunder-storm should burst too soon?

But the shower did not come at all. It passed over to the south and left the afternoon

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sky clear and warm. It turned out to be a fine day for "him and her" to be strolling forgetfully through pastures where ferns and penny-royal sent up a country fragrance as slow feet brushed among them.

Did these two chance to turn from those uplands and look off to the ocean that undulated in blue sheen under the blue heaven?

Mr. Peake called at the shanty an hour later to say that things were all right up to the barn, and he hoped we'd had a good time on the cart. Though the hay was in we mustn't begin to think of goin'. He said 't wa'n't fair to Ma'sh-field to leave 'fore we'd had a coot stew. Coots 'd be plenty in a week or two, and he'd engage to shoot a couple for us, 'n' his wife would tell us how to make a stew. Folks might say what they pleased, but there wa' n't nothin' like a coot stew with dumplin's.

XIII

THE REBELLION OF JULY'S YOUNG MAN

THERE has been somewhat of a mental flatness to depress us since the hay was in. The terrestrial flatness upon which we have been living for so long has ceased, we think, to affect us. To dwell upon dike lands seems by this time a natural thing to do, but we have not now the stimulant furnished by the interest and the irritation of cutting and making hay by proxy. And we have not seen Miss Vance for some days.

Her absence has revealed quite clearly how much she has interested us. We talk her over a great deal. We say that we are afraid that Leife Peake is going to win her too easily. We believe that a man ought to have a hard fight to get the woman he loves, particularly when she is such a woman as Mrs. Peake's niece. But it

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is in stories, not often in real life, that a man has to struggle to secure his choice. Girls are too much like the ripe peach — or is it plum? — which drops almost before the hand is extended.

We have read all our novels. We have recovered from riding on the load of hay, so far as we may recover from such an experience. We have “used our jedgment” in the perfectly successful preparation of bumonge for the young man at Mr. Grant’s, and have been rewarded by being told that he remarked that he could really eat the stuff.

This person has been gaining rapidly both in strength and ferocity, if we may trust the reports his nurse circulates concerning him.

She also says that Virginy has ben ter see him twice to her certain knowledge, and she can’t tell how many times that she don’t know. She heard him er beggin’ ’n’ er pleadin’ to her to promise to come every day.

“You’d think his life hung on her comin’, when there I be constant,” said July, aggrievedly, “ter wait upon him if he but jest winks his eye. I s’pose he’ll git over his tantrums ter see her

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when he c'n git out for himself. They mostly does."

We have fulfilled a long cherished intention and taken Ozias to the Brant, and have paid for all the ice-cream he could eat at a single sitting, learning at that time that a wholesale purchase of the delicacy would have been far better for our purpose, for he ate until he began to be blue about the mouth, which we thought was a symptom that he also was beginning to freeze. His tongue was so nearly congealed on the way home, that it was only just before we came to the pea-green house where he resides that he was able to articulate enough to say that he wished he had tried a little of the vanilla flavor, though p'raps it was jest as well to stick to lemon.

His mother was standing at the gate watching for us anxiously. She had given her permission, but she was naturally uneasy until our return. She told us as we slowly came nearer that she more than half thought that she should never see 'Zias alive again, but she s'posed the Lord had preserved him. We said that, if he should live for the next twelve hours, we thought she

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might consider him as entirely inoculated, or insured, as regarded ice-cream. Ozias leaned against the house wall with such a tired air that Mrs. Baker told him to go right on to the lounge and rest himself, and he obeyed her without a murmur. We sat down on the doorstep, and so impressed had we been by witnessing the idiot's prowess, that we had a vicarious sense of having ourselves over-eaten upon lemon ice-cream, and felt that we should need no more food for a long time.

Mar Baker asked us with great interest how much our hay was going to cost us, and we were glad to be able to say that we did not know yet what Mr. Peake's bill was. Then she said with a sigh that women wa'n't fit to tend to them things, but ended more cheerfully with the remark that she guessed we were used to it, never havin' had no man, and she had heard that folks could even git used to goin' on one leg, or no legs at all, if it came to that.

Neither of us seemed to be able to think of any response to make to this remark, and a constrained silence fell upon us, presently broken by the loud snores of Ozias who had fallen

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asleep on the lounge the other side of the open window.

Finally Mrs. Baker said that now our hay was in she reckoned we should be thinkin' of goin'.

But no, we were not going, we said, until we had seen something of the beauties of early fall here by the sea and had had a coot stew. At mention of a coot stew the small woman visibly brightened, and remarked that she was not one who thought too much of her victuals, but she would say she was glad when coots come, though 'Zias was apt to over-eat himself. As she said the last words she put her hand up to shade her eyes while she gazed up the white, dusty road. The road was very hot as well as dusty. It had been a "dry time" for the last few weeks, and there was a kind of oppressive gloom over this part of the world, so parched and sere looked everything. It was only when sitting on the beach that one felt that there was water anywhere.

"Mebbe you know who that is," said Mrs. Baker at last, "but I can't make it out, near-sighted's I be."

What we saw seemed to be a form, whether of man or woman we could not tell, coming

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toward us in the middle of the road. The scorching southerly wind kept blowing up clouds of dust which obscured the person approaching. A long-flowered gown covered the figure entirely and it was coming on with the aid of crutches.

In a moment we all rose to our feet, and Mar Baker cried out, "The land's sake! If that ain't July Burns's young man!"

Yes, it was July's patient, and he was now close upon us. He did not notice us in the least until he had seated himself upon the door-step, which we, in our amazement, had vacated. Then he drew his gorgeous dressing-gown around him, looked at us and said he hoped he did n't intrude, but he was bound to get out of that cursed stuffy little room for a few minutes. He leaned back and panted from his exertions. He was very thin and white, but he looked like a man who is getting well, and who was irritable to the verge of desperation. As he gazed about him it almost seemed as if he wished to strike out, right and left, with one of his crutches, and thus relieve himself of the wrath and resentment which were boiling within him.

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Mar Baker seemed awe-struck at sight of him. She ventured to express the hope that his ribs were all right, whereupon he snarled the reply that he did n't believe there had ever been anything the matter with his ribs. He would have been well long ago if it had not been for that infernal doctor and that infernal nurse, curse them both! Here he pulled himself up and said, looking at us, that we really must pardon him, but all the comfort he had was in cursing and swearing. My friend said quietly that she should judge that he must have been rather comfortable then. The young man's pale face reddened until, glancing down the road he had just traversed, an expression of fury banished all other expressions.

We followed his glance and saw July Burns coming like one who is in pursuit, but who can make very little progress on account of a too great load of flesh. Mr. Ross, after that first look, leaned his head back and closed his eyes, as in despairing surrender.

July came up puffing. She was so breathless that she could not speak. Meanwhile her charge kept his eyes persistently shut, as though,

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if they were opened, they would see a sight they could not endure.

It was an interesting tableau now before us, and one at which we looked with a mixture of pity and interest. We only needed Ozias to complete the figures. He, however, slumbered on audibly within the house.

As soon as she could command her voice, Mrs. Burns, with her hands on her hips, said huskily, "Wall! I never! I declare, I never did!"

The escaped patient winced and shrunk as he heard her, but he did not open his eyes.

"I wonder," went on July, "I wonder if folks that go gallivantin' like this here, ever expect broken bones to knit! They carn't knit; 't aint possible! What'll the doctor say?"

The invalid, still with closed eyes, vibrated through his thin frame. I heard him mutter that the doctor might go to the devil, and the nurse too.

"How's he goin' to be got back?" went on July. "He'll have a relupse, sure's fate. I wish one of you folks," looking at us, "would go right over to Mr. Kendall's and git him to

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harness inter his democrat, and put a bed on it, 'n' come here's quick's ever he can. Tell him it's a case of sickness."

Much to our surprise, July's patient now opened his eyes, but he kept them carefully fixed on us. He spoke with surprising energy.

"Yes," he said, "I beg you to go to Mr. Kendall's for his democrat, whatever that is. Tell him to come confounded quick, too!"

Mrs. Burns looked exultantly at us as if she said, "See, how he is conquered!"

But there was a gleam in the man's glance that made us suspicious. There was also even greater pallor, and a look as if he were beginning to suffer greatly.

We responded to this request by hastening along over the road toward Mr. Kendall's, which lay a hot quarter of a mile distant.

Mr. Kendall had to be called in from a field where he was digging early potatoes. And he insisted upon asking a good many questions before he would really begin to harness. But he did harness and we rode back to Mar Baker's with him, sitting on the mattress he had placed in the wagon after having removed the seats.

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We found that Mrs. Baker had put a pillow to the stranger's back, and a footstool under his leg. He was looking badly spent with fatigue and pain.

July came bustling forward to help, and the patient immediately closed his eyes again. More pillows were brought and arranged. Mr. Kendall, being a big, strong man, lifted the now helpless fellow into the carriage. Having seen him well arranged, July turned to go back to Mr. Grant's to await the coming of her charge.

Now the closed eyes were opened again, and the man motioned to Mr. Kendall, with quite a show of animation, so that I hardly knew whether he had been feigning a trifle or not.

"Don't take me back," he said, vehemently, "I won't go! If you take me there, I'll kill her! She's so fat! Take me to the best hotel at the Brant. Ten dollars if you will. I shall be well in a week if I can get away from her! She's so fat! Go ahead! I'll make it fifteen dollars."

Mr. Kendall looked involuntarily at us as if for advice. Now I recall the moment I am almost sure that I bent my head as if counselling

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him to go. He laughed and started his horse briskly over toward the Brant.

Now Brant Rock village was in a different direction from that taken by Mrs. Burns, and presently that person perceived that the sound of wheels was receding instead of approaching. She turned round, and, standing still, she endeavored, by flourishing her arms in strange signals, to make Mr. Kendall know he was going the wrong way. But, as Mr. Kendall's back was turned toward her, her gesticulations had no effect. Then she began running toward us, if that kind of propelling motion may be called running. She was purple and breathless when she came near. Finally, after two or three attempts, she succeeded in asking furiously,

“Don't John Kendall know that ain't the way to Mr. Grant's? Don't he know nothin'?”

It was Mar Baker who spoke, and she tried to be soothing.

“'T aint well for you to run, July. You're too fleshy, don't ye know ye be? Lemme git you a glass of water.”

Inability to go on made July lean against the fence. When Mrs. Baker came out with a

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pink mug filled with water, Mrs. Burns was able to move it away scornfully, and to say, —

“You ain’t no nuss, Mar Baker, or you wouldn’t give cold water to anybody’s hot’s I be.”

Nevertheless, she drank from the pink mug, and then asked with asperity if we knew what John Kendall thought he was a-doin’.

I took it upon myself to reply that the invalid had requested to be taken to a hotel, and I suspected Mr. Kendall was taking him to the Brant.

It was very wicked in my friend to add that she believed the young man would immediately have a trained nurse.

Hearing this, Mrs. Burns threw up her head and rolled her eyes.

“Then I wash my hands of him,” she cried out. “He’ll have a relupse, ’n’ if a trained nuss can bring him out of a relupse, she’s welcome to do it.”

XIV

A PIECE OF MUSIC

DURING the week which followed the revolt and escape of July's charge, his fate, so far as we were concerned, was shrouded in mystery. We had no opportunity to make inquiries as to his welfare from any one, save Mrs. Burns herself, and we could not consider her an unprejudiced person. She says "he has been swallowed up, and she don't know nothin' 'bout him." Now, to say a man has been "swallowed up" is not to speak definitely, but only to bring to the mind of the listener vague memories of Jonah, and of "proud Korah's troupe," all of whom were swallowed, but under widely different circumstances. July always added that she had washed her hands of him, and that if he had a relapse she should always be thankful that she was not responsible. She affected an air of relief and gratitude that she was no longer his nurse. She said that he wore

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upon her more than any person she had ever waited on. For some reason she still lingered at Mrs. Grant's. She said she remained to "help Miss Grant put her house to rights, for it was all tore up, 'n' she hoped that young man would make it right with them, even if he never did with her."

She sometimes wonders, with a very exasperated expression of countenance, what that Virginy Vance thinks of the feller now. She gives it to be understood that the girl was probably reckoning upon ketchin' him. Mrs. Burns supposes he has "oceans of money, 'n' any gal 'd be tickled to death ter git him." She is not at all sanguine that Miss Vance will be able to ketch him, but generously says she is welcome to try.

During these days Mrs. Burns was often seen on the way to Mrs. Baker's or to our shanty. She would sit for hours at a time in our most comfortable chair, placed in the coolest spot in the shade, and meditate, and talk. She said she was trying to rest herself after the strain there had been upon her. She never was with us ten minutes that she did not tell us that she had

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washed her hands of her former patient. She related several times the history of her acquaintance with Joel Burns, before and after marriage, and it was always just as I have written it down in a former chapter. We became so familiar with it that we frequently recited portions of it to each other when she was not present. We knew exactly at what time Joel brought his mother over, and his sister that married a Brett, and about his horse trades. Indeed, at this time in our lives we felt that there was not room in our minds for any thoughts not connected with Joel Burns and his widow.

We felt more keenly than ever for the poor fellow who had been obliged to lie still that his bones might knit, and so could not escape this tale, no matter how many times it was repeated. We did not wonder he swore. We thought it likely that this profanity, however reprehensible it might be in itself, furnished an outlet which saved his life.

Mrs. Burns sung to us many times a "piece of music" — that is what she called it — which Joel was accustomed to sing in the days of his courtship. The tune was not in the least com-

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plicated, and my friend soon learned it; but I, not being able to sing anything, could only master the words, and these I learned so effectually that I repeated them mentally, sleeping or waking, and had a strong fear that they would henceforth flavor everything I should ever read or hear. I will give a few verses, only a few, for there would hardly be space enough anywhere for them all. I was always uncertain as to the sequence in which they came, for they were sung "just as it happened," without regard to the unities:—

"Tell her to buy me a yard of cloth,
For to make me a shirt thereof;
Tell her to make it up with one stitch,
Or a horse-hair, I don't care which,
Then she shall be a true lover of mine, true
lover of mine.

"A parcel of sage, rosemary and thyme;
Tell her to wash it out in a dry well
In which never a drop of water there fell;
Tell her to hang it out on a sharp thorn
Which never bore a bud since Adam was born,
And then she shall be a true lover of mine,
true lover of mine."

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There were a great many lines in which he tells her of impossible things which she must do if she aspired to be a true lover of his, until the heart of the listener began to bleed for the poor girl, when suddenly the thing is reversed, and we are rejoiced to hear that it is she who is singing in this way : —

“ Tell him to buy me an acre of land,
’Twixt the sea and the sea-sand ;
Tell him to plow it up with a cockle’s horn
And sow it all over with one pepper-corn,
And then he shall be a true lover of mine,
true lover of mine.

“ Tell him to reap it before it grew,
And reap it down with the sole of his shoe ;
Tell him to thresh it out with a goose quill,
And to winnow it in an egg shell ;
And then he shall be a true lover of mine,
true lover of mine.”

After a while I noticed that, in whatever order the verses happened to be sung, this was always the last one : —

“ Kind sir, are you bound unto Cape Ann ?
My service to that same young man,

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For once he was a true lover of mine, true lover
of mine,
A parcel of sage, rosemary, and thyme."

It was gratifying to us to be able to conclude that the feminine speaker in this piece of music had the last word, and we thought that the sarcasm on her part was even more fine and biting than that on his part. Altogether, we had never heard the like, and were greatly impressed. Mrs. Burns sang it to us so many times within a few days that we used to wonder if she had sung it to her patient, and if the composition had had anything to do with his escape.

At the end of a week Mr. Kendall met us on the road and drew in his horse to say that p'raps we'd like to know about that young feller that had run away. We eagerly said we should like to know, and were informed that he was to the Brant, and was doing prime; would probably be leavin' in a fortnight or less. That he had n't no nuss of any kind, and had n't had since he left Mrs. Grant's. Furthermore he had put a sum of money into his, Mr. Kendall's hands, with which to pay the Grants and July,

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and the doctor. Then Mr. Kendall drove on a few yards; but he pulled in his horse and looked back to tell us that the feller said he'd ruther be hung than to see his nuss again. "He says she's so fat; 'n' he says" — here the speaker laughed so that it was with difficulty that he continued — "'n' he says he's afraid he never shall live long 'nough to forgit all 'bout Joel Burns's courtship 'n' marriage, 'n' the sister that married a Brett."

Here Mr. Kendall's horse started and Mr. Kendall himself shook so on the seat that he looked as if he would fall off.

When we reached our shanty there was Mrs. Burns sitting in the shade, fanning herself and humming "a parcel of sage." We were beginning to wonder what we had done to deserve so much of July Burns, and we were so far from glad to see her just now that I am afraid we had a pleasure in telling her what we had just heard. But she took the news very calmly, and did not apparently resent it when I said that we all ought to be thankful that her patient had not been swallowed up as she had reported. She said that, "leastways, he might as well have

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ben swallowed up," and did not explain when we asked what she meant by that. She acknowledged that she had seen Mr. Kendall and had the money. She was willing to own that the feller had n't been stingy. She was altogether so mollified that we inferred that she had been well paid. She left the topic as soon as possible and remarked that folks said that Rodge Peake's wife was a failin', she ain't been well sence she put her shoulder out early in the spring, but she ain't one to make no fuss about herself. "I should n't be one mite suprised if she was a-failin'." The woman added that she did n't s'pose Virginy knew how sick her aunt was, for gals had n't much sense any way. Virginia 'd ben visitin' a friend out to Neponset for a week, 'n' when she was to home likely 's not she 'n' Leife was so much taken up er courtin' they did n't notice Miss Peake. She thought probable Virginy was er fixin' by this time.

When we asked her what she meant by "fixin'," it was explained that no gal as respected herself would think of gittin' married 'thout jest so much time spent in makin' table-

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cloths, towels, 'n' such, and to be employed in this work with marriage in prospect, was to be fixin'.

I hardly think Mrs. Burns believed the marriage tie could be legally binding upon a woman who had not previously gone through this process. We learned later that it is customary to announce an engagement by simply saying that "so and so is er fixin'."

July went on to give minute particulars as to the way in which Mrs. Peake put her shoulder out, and how she was there three weeks to take care of her. "She put it out," said July, as if speaking of a candle flame, "a-tryin' to help Rodge in one of his nerve 'tacks. You mark my words, they'll be the death of that woman. When you have a husband that is subject to nerve 'tacks, I tell you it don't lengthen your days. Joel was jest what he was, but he did n't drink, thank the Lord!"

Every time July mentioned Joel we were afraid that she would go on with the history which we had heard so many times, and we used to try frantically to change the subject. We were now sure, from a certain look which

In a Dike Shanty

came to her face, when she was going to begin. She had never yet told the tale in our hearing without that preliminary look, and we saw it on her face now. I do not know how it was with my friend, but I had a wild impulse to turn and run over the dike. I had made two or three steps away from the shanty when I saw approaching over the grass an open wagon containing a man and a woman. In another moment I knew that they were Mr. and Mrs. Rodge Peake.

It seemed to us a providential thing that Mrs. Burns chose to depart after having stopped long enough to hear Mr. Peake say jovially that here he was, and he had brought his wife and his bill for hay-making.

I had always liked Mr. Peake, and now my heart quite warmed to him as I saw with what tenderness he lifted his companion down from the awkward wagon, and gave her his arm as she walked up to the chair July had vacated.

Mrs. Peake looked more gentle, more thin and white than ever, and her voice was slower, more piercing in its pathos as she drawled her reply to our inquiries about her health. She

A Piece of Music

said that Rodge was trying to make out she was sick, but she guessed she should be all right when the bracing weather come. The trouble was she kept taking a bit of a cold now and then, and somehow she could n't quite get rid of her cough.

Rodge stood looking at her with open anxiety upon his face. When she ceased speaking he glanced at us and said, with a great show of cheerfulness and confidence, that she 'd be sure to be all right when the bracing weather come. These dog days were enough to pull anybody down. Oh, she'd be all right.

"That's what I tell him," said Mrs. Peake softly, falling back in her chair, and breathing quickly.

It appeared difficult for Mr. Peake to keep his eyes from his wife's face, and when he asked one of us to go to the barn with him, and I went, he leaned up against the barn door and said tremulously that he vowed he could n't help being anxious, and he felt ten thousand times worse because she was so kind of cheerful 'n' hopeful, and what did I really think of her looks?

In a Dike Shanty

I hesitated and finally said that she seemed frail.

“You don’t think it’s nothin’ worse ’n’ that, do you?” he inquired, eagerly. “You know frail folks sometimes have a mighty tough streak in ’em.”

I assented. He tried visibly to cheer up.

He guessed Marcia’d feel better when Virginy come back. Virginy was a prime one to have round in the house. But when he explained that he had no idea his wife was so weak, till she come to try to git into the wagon, his voice broke again, he turned away, and we stood in silence.

XV

A COOT STEW

WE have had a party and a coot stew on one and the same day. The one was the instigator of the other. If we had not had the coot stew we should not have had the party. Mr. Peake brought us yesterday morning a pair of the fowls above mentioned. He shot them himself, and appeared to take great pleasure in giving them to us. Not knowing what was in the near future, we expressed gratitude to him. We can always have the consciousness that, whatever happened later, we were sincere at the time we thanked him.

The animals, I mean the fowls, were denuded of their feathers and ready to cook. Mr. Peake had even been so thoughtful as to bring their wings, two pair of them, thinking that we might want them to put on hats. He said we might tell our friends when we went away that

In a Dike Shanty

we shot the critters, if we wanted to, for he believed it was not customary to go away from Ma'shfield without having killed a few coots, and we could show the wings as proof of the truth of our assertion. We promised to consider the suggestion.

The coots looked darker than we had thought, and were altogether different from what our ideal had pictured them to be. From the first moment of their arrival Orlando had manifested a strong, and at the same time, disgusted interest in them. He wished to sniff at them constantly, and each sniff appeared to nauseate him.

Mr. Peake said his wife sent word to us that if we wa n't used to sea-fowl, and did n't exactly know whether we liked them or not, we'd better parboil them the day before we made the stew, and throw that water away. By so doing we should get rid of some of the oil. "Then," said Mr. Peake, "all you've got to do is to make 'em up jest like any stew; onions, per-taters and dumplin's."

Again we expressed our gratitude. Mr. Peake said he was glad he happened to git um, for 't was kind of early. He was in great spirits,

A Coot Stew

and informed us that his wife seemed better than she had been all summer. He'd been sure all along the bracing weather'd bring her round.

And Virginy had come home. She'd be over to see us directly.

As soon as he had gone, we washed the coots carefully and put them on to parboil. When the odor began to diffuse itself in the little room Orlando went out of doors with his nose very much turned up. But we remained, being very sure that we liked coots. For myself, I had inwardly sworn that nothing should prevent my liking them as food, although as odorating articles I now perceived that I was not pleased with them. But it was not for their perfume we were cooking them; it was for their gustatory and nourishing qualities.

I hope it will not be suspected that the coots had been killed so long that they were too old. They were perfectly fresh, and their fragrance was not from age. There may be people who will read this chapter who are old enough to remember the lamps with whale oil in them which were wont to illuminate the past. Those who remember the lamps will recall the scent

In a Dike Shanty

they threw around them, if they happened not to be in perfect cleanliness.

It was dreadful, though we would not then admit it, that anything we expected to eat should smell exactly like old whale-oil.

My friend made the observation that Orlando seemed very fastidious this morning, and that she herself noticed that the coots diffused an odor not like anything else ; but she supposed that when they had been parboiled all that sort of thing would be dispelled. I agreed with her.

At the proper time we removed the coots from the kettle, carried the kettle a good ways over the dike and emptied its contents, the terrier following us and snuffing like a terrier bewitched.

“When we put the fowls on for the stew to-morrow,” I said cheerfully, “there won’t be anything like this.”

My companion assented with unnecessary ardor to my assertion.

It is useless to try to explain the fact that all the remainder of the day we were depressed and silent, as if we had something on our minds.

Mrs. Peake had sent word that we must be sure and put the coots on early and have them

A Coot Stew

boil every minute until dinner time, because, though so good when done, before they were done they were tough.

We rose earlier than usual, still depressed and silent. My friend said that she would put on the coots while I went over to Mrs. Grant's for our daily milk.

Long before I reached the shanty, on my return, the wind being the right way, I inhaled the fumes of cooking coots, and I owned to myself, undisguisedly then, that the lamp oil was just as strong as on the day before. I carefully carried our pint of milk in what I was every day convinced was a half-pint bowl.

I was naturally somewhat absorbed in the effort to keep the milk all in the bowl. This effort, and the odor from the shanty were making me more and more gloomy. I did not see anything but my bowl and I did not smell anything but coots.

I was not aware of the step behind me, and only saw a tanned hand advanced and the bowl taken, while a sweet, languid voice drawled, —

“I have steadier nerves this morning than you have. Why do you take a vessel of that

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size for more milk than it can hold? Is it to mortify the flesh? Are you under a vow?"

Virginia's face, when I looked at it, had such a happy expression upon it that I began immediately, as it were, to bask in its light.

For a moment she made me forget what I will call, without any desire to be blasphemous, the hell-broth we were concocting at the shanty.

I watched the unswerving hand which held the bowl of milk. Again I felt how well strung she was. Doubtless she had nerves, but they were thoroughly sheathed and in order.

I told her it must be a great thing to be a woman, and yet carry a hand like that. It seemed to me that this capability indicated a good deal. She smiled. She was very ready to smile this morning. Her look was the look of one who must radiate the glow from within.

"It is the sunshine," she said. "When the sun has this warmth in it I am intoxicated. The summer is too short here at the North. There is Leife. Wave your handkerchief. You see I am hampered."

I heard the galloping of a horse's feet on the road. In the perfectly still air the sound was

A Coot Stew

almost metallic. The rider had flung up his hat and was looking at us. I did as Virginia bade me, feeling that the salute would not be received gratefully.

“We walked over from Uncle Peake’s,” said the girl, her eyes following the rider. “He is going up to the village for some medicine for Aunt Marcia. She is really better. We are quite cheered.”

She looked at young Peake until with one more up-tossing of the hat he disappeared on the inland road. Then she sighed, but smiled.

Hearing and seeing her, I sighed but did not smile.

I could not say I did not approve of Leife Peake, and I certainly believed I understood why he had fallen in love with the girl by my side. If he had not done so I would have set him down as a blind dolt. But I would not have arranged that she should love him. Let him be sighing and dying for her. Let her gently and coldly pity him until Prince Charming came to Ma’shfield and saw her and won her and carried her away beyond the utmost purple rim.

A woman’s imagination, as is well known,

In a Dike Shanty

when occupied by this congenial topic will go a great ways in a short time.

As we came near the shanty the — shall I say — effluvia proceeding from it banished all such fancies.

My companion sniffed. She threw her head back and sniffed again. She said one word, and that word was “Coots.”

She did not utter it as an interrogation, but simply as an assertion.

I was greatly relieved to find that she knew, and that I need not explain anything.

As we came still nearer, she looked at me again and said that perhaps we liked them. With an effort toward politeness she went on to remark that some people did like them.

My friend within the shanty was stirring egg and coffee together, and she had a set look of despair on her face. Orlando stood a moment within the door, then walked away and carefully sat down in a place where the wind blew from him toward the house, and there he went to sleep.

We begged Virginia to stay with us through the experience upon which we were now enter-

A Coot Stew

ing. We said we knew she might suffer, but her presence would be a comfort to us. She was too good-natured not to consent.

She drank some coffee in our company and in company of the stew, though she said she had breakfasted at the usual Peake hour; just before daylight. That hour always gave her a certain uncanny sense of having risen in the middle of the night and eaten and drank with ghosts by a kerosene lamp that had not been filled since the night before. She supposed it was a necessary thing to do, because almost all the neighbors partook of their first meal at that time and in that way. It made a long forenoon, and long forenoons seemed to be the one thing for which Yankees longed. They differed from the lotus eaters.

“Now for my part,” went on Virginia, leaning her head back against the grimy wall, and sitting in such a way that the rigid chair which held her directly seemed a lounging chair, “for my part I think happiness ought to be some object in life. My happiness would not be achieved by grubbing for pennies before light in the morning.

In a Dike Shanty

“Be sure I would not have made this confession before a real resident of the town. I value their good opinion too much. What do you think Mrs. Burns would say if she heard me? She thinks very little of those who are not ‘scrabbling.’ Do you know the height of praise Mar Baker can bestow? It is when she says of a young man, ‘He ’ll make a good husband; he ’s a nice, scrabblin’ sort of a feller.’

“It was a good while before I could imagine what the word meant. Poor woman! She has had to scrabble all her life. I hope she will get to a place some time where it is always afternoon, and will be so changed that she will be glad of it. Can you fancy her as resting?”

The tones of the speaker were full of sympathy and pity. She immediately changed them as she said, —

“Have you ever known the curious experience it is to take ’Zias off in the fields for a few hours? I’ve done it several times because I was so sorry for his mother. When I do it I give myself up to one occupation, and that is hunting for trees that are just right for him to swing from their tops. I tell you he makes it arduous work.

A Coot Stew

If you give over for a minute he begins to cry, and then you know that you would rather sacrifice almost anything than to hear him cry. There is nothing in this world that makes me so angry as to hear Ozias Baker cry. He bellows and he snuffles and he punches his fists into his eyes, and he gurgles that he will tell his mar, until the temptation to slap him hard and often is a temptation nearly irresistible. But you must not slap him, because he is not half-witted. All you can do is to hurry frantically to find another tree for him to swing on. Then he laughs, and when he laughs you are only one degree less irritated than when he cries. Yes, Ozias is a companion to be dreaded."

About an hour after breakfast, which, for some reason I was sure none of us enjoyed, my fellow-sufferer, who was slicing potatoes and onions for the stew, proposed that we invite a few friends to dine with us. We hailed the proposition with delight. She said it was a pity to have such a good dinner all by ourselves; and I added that it was a shame to be so selfish as that; and we would put the table and chairs on the shady side, and I would go

In a Dike Shanty

immediately and borrow plates and things from Mrs. Grant. Before I went, however, we settled that I should invite Mr. and Mrs. Grant, July Burns, and Ozias and his mother. We wished we could also ask Mr. Peake and his wife, but they were too far away for so impromptu a dinner party, and their niece was sure her uncle could not leave his work.

I set off quite gayly on my errands ; all the people promised to come, and seemed pleased with the prospect of a coot stew. Mrs. Burns offered to arrive early and season it for us, for she said that a great deal depended on the amount of pepper and salt there was in this kind of victuals. She seemed much chagrined when I confessed, in answer to her question, that we had not put in a red pepper in whole form, just as that condiment grew in the garden. She had never heard of a coot stew being made in any other way, and plainly thought still less of us from that moment.

As the time approached for us to leave the shanty, perhaps never again to return to it, I felt a welcome sense of independence as to what July Burns did think of us. I was sure

A Coot Stew

that she pitied us somewhat and despised us more. Was it not true that we had never been able to ketch no man, and that we had not, until very recently, been capable of making bumonge? What more need she to know? But I cared now little as to whether or not we should succeed before we left in modifying her opinion of us. I could not explain to myself why I had ever cared a particle what her judgment was concerning us. My friend declared that it was a lack of moral stamina that had made us so weak. She said that though she was not sure as to what moral stamina was precisely, she was certain it was a good thing to have, and she never meant to go to any place like a dike again without it. In the future she intended not to care what people like Mar Baker and Joel Burns's relict thought of her.

It was thus that we exchanged thoughts and resolves after I had hastened back from giving my invitations, and while we were hurrying to arrange the table out of doors and place the borrowed crockery thereon before our guests should appear.

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Miss Vance went off, politely accompanied by Orlando. When she returned she bore large quantities of asters and golden rod, with which she decked the otherwise somewhat bare table. It is true that some of the flowers had to be put in empty stone beer bottles, and that the attempt to hide the bottles by twining five-fingered ivy about them was distressingly unsuccessful. There seemed to be a natural antipathy on the part of the bottles toward any sort of decoration, and their glazed sides smoothly rejected every clambering leaf. They were beer jugs and declined to be obscured or disguised in any way.

If we ever give a fashionable dinner-party I do not think we shall suffer so much anxiety as we felt concerning that coot stew.

It would be indescribably shameful to us if the dish should not be just what these people were accustomed to having; and, to add to our responsibility, we had reason to think that ours would be the first coot stew of the season, and thus attended by a certain *éclat* which would make a failure all the harder to bear.

As time went on the odor within the shanty-

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became stronger and stronger ; and, in truth, it was a dreadful odor. It did not seem possible that our dinner ought to send forth such a stench ; certainly stench does not seem too strong a name for it.

I was thankful that Mr. and Mrs. Grant were the first to arrive, instead of Mrs. Burns. We placed Mr. Grant in the shade and then we begged his wife to come in the house for a moment. She limped good-naturedly into the shanty. We, with poorly disguised solicitude, asked her if she would honestly tell if what we were cooking smelled all right.

Mrs. Grant lifted the lid from the kettle, as if that were necessary. But the action seemed to make things stronger, and I wished I were outside, in the place Orlando had selected in which to pass the time while we were engaged in what must seem to him barbarous orgies. We watched Mrs. Grant's face and hung upon her words.

"Law !" she said, replacing the kettle cover, "don't you worry one bit. The stew smells proper nice. It'll be first-rate. I see you've got the dumplin's ready. I guess I'll put 'em in."

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While she was placing the balls of dough on top of the bubbling mass of potatoes, onions, and coots, she was asked if really the thing ought to smell quite so, — well, quite so awful, you know.

She looked at us in amazement. We felt our spirits rise. Her amazement seemed to turn to sorrow for us.

“I’m afraid,” she said, “that you don’t like coots. They be kind of strong for you folks that are made so you ain’t fond of ’em.”

All our friends came.

We shall never cease to be grateful to Miss Vance for the marvellous skill with which she pretended to eat heartily of the mess which we set before her. She was, as they say here, so “easy in her manners,” and she had “such pooty ways” of speaking about the whole affair, that the stew seemed to its lovers, I am sure, even better than it was. How could she appear to like it so well?

I suppose that Ozias will live, for no one seemed astonished at his success in regard to the amount he ate. Perhaps I ought to be humiliated because I felt proud and thankful

A Coot Stew

when, about half-way through the banquet, the under-witted one proclaimed aloud that he thought it was the best coot stew he had ever tasted. I was so elated at hearing him say these words that I was happy during the rest of the time that the party lasted. It was like receiving praise from Sir Hubert Stanley.

Yes, it must have been a good stew. The feasters not only praised it, but ate copiously of it. They seemed not able to stop eating. But then it was the first stew of the season. We, who had concocted it, could almost say that this was the proudest moment of our lives. I am sure that, if either of us had made an after-dinner speech, we should have used that phrase. It was plain, beyond mistake, that July Burns approved; and we felt that we had at last shown ourselves worthy of her approval.

As for me, I will not hesitate to say that I do not like coots. I courageously tasted our own dinner, but that was all; it was more than enough. To quote that always quotable child, Little Marjory, a coot "is a thing I am not a member of," and to quote her again, a coot "is devilish."

In a Dike Shanty

The guests pitied us when they found we could not relish this delicacy. They tried to encourage us by saying that perhaps we might learn to like it. But why, we asked ourselves, should we try to enjoy a flavor made up of the flavors of rancid fish oil and wild-fowl that appear to have fed on stale fish; a combination of the worst there is in fish and fowl. Is it worth while to spend effort in acquiring a liking for coots?

Ozias did not pity us. I saw that he was glad we did not partake, for would there not be more for him?

At last there was one plateful left, and this we made Mrs. Baker take home with her that she might warm it over for her son's supper. When our party had dispersed we called Orlando in. He came very gingerly, with nose elevated suspiciously; but things seemed better to him. He consented to join us in a plain meal of bread and milk. In this repast we were also joined by Miss Vance who professed to be almost starved.

XVI

AN AFTER-DINNER EPISODE

WE who had prepared the coot dinner and borne the responsibility of it, naturally suffered a reaction after our triumph. It was very warm, as it is likely to be on a September midday. Our dinner had been at precisely twelve of the clock. We knew our neighbors too well to offer them a dinner at any other hour. By one they were gone, the dishes were washed, the fire in the stove was out.

The sun was looking down unblinkingly upon the silent dike lands, — silent save for the monotonous whir and drone of the insects in the parched "second crop" grass. That whir and drone seemed but the voice, the accentuation of the silence.

Virginia was lying on the ground in the shade, with a folded shawl for a pillow. She said she liked nothing in a warm day so well as

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lying in the shade unless it were to lie in the sun.

Orlando was curled in a ball near her, occasionally opening shining eyes to peep through his hair and see that all was well.

My friend was asleep in one of the bunks. I opened a folding rattan chair and put it by the window and was soon asleep in it.

I have described these arrangements so particularly that the practised reader will immediately suspect that something is going to happen. Yes, the practised reader will be right.

What happened was that I became an eavesdropper. If I had not explained about the rattan chair and the open window it might not have been thoroughly understood why I overheard as I did.

I seemed to be dreaming. I dreamed that an immense coot flew over from the water and alighted close to the shanty, and that the terrier growled but did not bark. The coot put up one claw and took off his head as if it were a hat, and said, —

“Ah, pardon me, Miss Vance. But I am so glad to find you that I can’t be sorry to dis-

An After-Dinner Episode

turb you. I have been up to your uncle's; I have looked everywhere for you."

By this time I was awake and knew that the speaker was not a coot but was July Burns's former patient, and that he was standing there with his hat in one hand, and a cane, on which he leaned, in the other. He was very pale and thin, and had a great expression of resolution on his face. His apparel was something so immaculate, so exquisitely appropriate to precisely this date of early fall, that I know I cannot adequately describe it.

Evidently Virginia had been in a deep sleep, for she put both hands to her face and pushed back her hair before she could return his gaze. She was now in a sitting posture on the grass.

"Pray be seated, Mr. Ross," she said at last, motioning toward a chair. "It was not wise of you to walk far."

"I have not walked far. I have a carriage on the road yonder."

He seemed glad to sit down, and more glad of the opportunity to continue looking at the girl. He availed himself of this opportunity in a very hungry way.

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"You gave me a certain promise when I was ill," he finally said, with some abruptness.

"People promise a great many things to a person who is ill," replied Virginia.

Mr. Ross did not choose to answer this remark. The determination in his face really made him look quite manly in spite of the effeminate carefulness in dress.

"I want to remind you of the promise," he said.

The girl was silent.

Mr. Ross seemed to grow more desperate and more determined.

"The promise," he said, "was that when I recovered you would allow me to flirt with you."

Virginia grew red.

"This is all very silly," she exclaimed. "Is it possible you have remembered such folly and come to claim a fulfilment?"

He moved his cane restlessly.

"I don't want you to fulfil the promise," he said with a kind of feeble violence. "I wouldn't allow it. But I have remembered. I remember every word you have said to me."

An After-Dinner Episode

He became silent. What did he mean? Perhaps his meaning was not hard to guess. I gazed at him with the calm curiosity of a third person. He was quite livid. His eyes looked hot.

I thought there was no need to proclaim my presence, for Miss Vance knew perfectly well where I was.

It was apparently out of the girl's power to break the silence. It was also unnecessary. In a moment he gave the following rather general definition with almost a tragic fervor : —

“To flirt is to amuse oneself.”

He paused as if to recover calmness ; and presently resumed, “I am past amusing myself where you are concerned.”

In his earnestness the young man must now command respect.

This time his companion did not flush. Neither did she speak. She gave him a glance.

I may have heretofore hinted that when Miss Vance looked at one in a certain way one was vividly aware of the fact. Even I, in the character of a calm third person, felt my blood suddenly glow because of a glance which did not

In a Dike Shanty

belong to me. What then, must have been its effect upon this man?

It was he who flushed now. He rose and made a step forward hastily.

I shall never know what he would have said, for she rose also and with a movement of her hand seemed to restrain him, even before she spoke.

“Here is my friend to whom you have not been presented.”

The young man came toward the window where I sat, and which Virginia also approached. He so plainly wished me perhaps at the bottom of the sea, that I was embarrassed by the mere fact of not being at the bottom of the sea.

He tried to stammer out some remark about the pleasures of an unconventional life in a shanty, and I tried to reply to him.

Virginia did not help us any. She may have been unable to do so. She was bending over and playing with Orlando. It was a bad moment for us all. It was terminated, or I might say aggravated, by the appearance of another actor.

An After-Dinner Episode

I heard some one whistling on the other side of the shanty, a quick, firm step, and Leife Peake appeared with his hands thrust into the pockets of his loose coat.

The instant he turned the corner of the building he felt the electricity in the air. He withdrew his hands from their resting place, and assumed that hostile attitude with which one man sometimes meets another. If he had been a dog he would have bristled. Not being a dog he did all he could to appear to bristle.

He plainly was not acquainted with the other gentleman, but knew him. There was something almost insolent in the way his eyes rested on the pale fellow who leaned somewhat heavily on his stick.

Miss Vance named the two to each other, and they grimly nodded.

Peake said that his mother had had a bad turn, and was besides a little anxious to know where her niece was, so she had sent him to find her. He added that he was very sorry to ask her to leave such company, glancing at Mr. Ross.

In a Dike Shanty

"I dare say mother can wait ; and you can come later."

He turned on his heel, but paused when Virginia said that she would immediately go home with him. Her tone had a slight edge to it as she spoke these words, and I wondered how Peake liked it. It was the first time I was made aware that there could be an edge to that voice.

In a very different way, and with marked courtesy, she said good-by to Mr. Ross. That gentleman had presence and strength of mind sufficient to ask permission to call upon her.

Then he limped slowly off toward his carriage, and the other two departed also.

It was only the girl who was thoughtful enough to bid adieu to me.

I sank back in my chair and fell to musing. My friend had continued to sleep. She had not witnessed the scene from this small comedy.

Orlando came and sat on my lap. We confided to each other our belief that it must be a very painful as well as a very interesting state when two men are in love with one woman.

An After-Dinner Episode

When I questioned Orlando as to which man the woman in her very heart most favored, the terrier cocked one ear, stopped panting, and suggested that, after all, the whole affair was probably of very little consequence. I, being a woman with a melancholy dearth of love affairs of my own, did not agree with Orlando.

Of course I knew she loved Peake. Had I not observed? Although I did not wholly approve of her loving Peake, I was convinced that she did love him. I was not conscious that July Burns's hints that "Virginy was er fixin'," had anything to do with these intuitions of mine.

I had seen that softening of the dark face, that sudden, unconscious melting of the eyes in Leife Peake's presence.

As I confided these ideas of mine to my friend when she at last emerged from her bunk she assented with almost suspicious readiness.

At the conclusion of our conversation on this subject she made one remark which rankled somewhat.

She said that, on the other hand, we could neither of us judge accurately as to what were

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Miss Vance's thoughts concerning Mr. Ross, because we had not been in a position to witness any unconscious softening and melting in that admirer's presence.

I had kept sacredly unspoken my knowledge of the way the girl had looked at Mr. Ross just now. What did my friend mean?

I do not know that this Southern New England girl could be blamed if she had a face and eyes which gave such delicious suggestions. Why accuse her if her face and eyes sometimes make you think unutterable things? And then her kindness, her cordiality were as spontaneous and genuine as the warm grasp of her hand.

If she had had an ugly face and pig eyes she might, of course, have had as kind a heart, but then who cares so much for a kind heart when connected with pig eyes?

Of one thing we were sure, — that it had been a great blessing to us that Mrs. Peake's niece had come north to live with her aunt.

XVII

POOR RODGE

“**D**RETFUL tryin’ weather for anybody that ’s sick.”

So said Mrs. Baker the other day as we all sat on the steps that led to the door of her house. Ozias had been sent to the post-office, and so there was a slight intermission in the stress of his mother’s anxiety concerning him, for he was never known to get into mischief in going to the post-office or in coming from it.

“Ee-us,” repeated Mrs. Baker, wearily, “it’s so trying that they say folks as come for the summer are goin’ away earlier ’n common. But that young feller, that Mr. Ross is still over to the Brant. I seen him yisterd’y in a buggy goin’ toward Rodge Peake’s. They say he’s a ha’ntin’ round there er sight. Jest bewitched with that Virginy, I guess. She goes out with him in his buggy once ’n a while.

In a Dike Shanty

Wall, I hope whoever ketches her 'll be worthy of her."

Mrs. Baker relapsed into a long silence.

It had been dry and hot in August and thus far into September. Every day the sun had risen red, had gone its round obscured partially by a smoky haze, and then had set redly in the west. We had almost ceased to think that it could rain, although a few times thunderheads had risen threateningly ; but they had only discharged a few big drops and then dispersed. It had begun to be "sickly" among the villages near the coast. One and another yielded to low, feverish attacks, and two deaths had occurred. We often saw the doctor's sulky going rapidly along the highway, a white dust whirling after it. There was a call for Mrs. Burns, but she had been for some time helping take care of Mrs. Peake, who, without seeming much worse, had yet gradually given up all pretence of work. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Mrs. Burns was doing the Peake housework than that she was nursing Mrs. Peake, who was dressed and about the house every day, particularly waited upon by

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her niece. Folks said that his wife's sickness was making a sober man of Mr. Peake, for he had not touched a drop of liquor so far as any one knew since that time when he had been mowing our grass.

Two days ago we walked over to see Mrs. Peake. We took her some dainties we had been able to prepare. Strange to say, though very thin, she seemed to have lost that faded look we had noticed when we first saw her, and now she had a startling resemblance to the blond pretty girl she must have been when she insisted upon marrying Rodge Peake. Her smile was sweeter, and her voice even more gentle and winning in its slow sound.

Virginia happened to be gone out to rest for a half hour and get a breath of fresh air. Her aunt said with feeling that she didn't know how she should live without Virginy.

The invalid appeared to be glad to see us. She said folks were very kind to her; she didn't know what she had done that folks should be so kind. Her words were often interrupted by her cough, about which she said nothing. She thought she was gradually im-

In a Dike Shanty

proving ; the doctor's medicine seemed to agree with her. No, she didn't have much appetite, but she expected she would soon come to that.

When we had risen to go, Mr. Peake came in with a basket of large, yellow porter apples he had been gathering. After one glance at him I hardly dared look again, his face was so pinched and worn. He shook hands with us and said briskly that he guessed we found his wife looking quite bright. We tried to answer in the same vein. When we had reached the door Mrs. Peake called us back and kissed us. She did not have the appearance of bidding us farewell, but only remarked that she supposed we would soon be leaving Ma'shfield, and we had been so kind.

Her husband stood without, his features working painfully. When we joined him in the little yard he again shook hands with us, as he told us brokenly that "Marcia had took to us from the first." Having said this, he walked quickly away, and we went homeward.

Yes, we repeated for the twentieth time, we must leave the shanty. Why should we stay

Poor Rodge

any longer? That brassy sky above us was depressing, and the never-ceasing moan of the ocean which, in its way, seemed to be affected by the "dry time," would finally give us melancholia. Orlando, who always mysteriously shared our moods, trotted on mechanically, with not even one dash aside.

This, as I said, was two days ago. Last night, when the sun was within an hour of setting, a great bank of clouds rose from the west and obscured that crimson ball. I was thankful. In the air there was a certain sense of moisture which we had not felt for long. Mar Baker said she really believed we should have rain before morning. Not two hours after that prophecy the gray, wet-looking clouds had covered the whole sky, smoothed and massed themselves, and the rain began to fall with a steady heaviness that was refreshing. There was no wind, and we stood at the door of our shanty and watched the sheets of water come down straightly. The terrier was so overjoyed that he ran out and capered in the wet, and we would have liked to follow his example.

In a Dike Shanty

It was in that darkest time in the next morning that Orlando's sharp barking disturbed us as we lay dreaming in our bunks. The rain was still pounding steadily on the roof. I was very sleepy, but I became wide awake when I heard something heavy fall against the door, and it seemed to me that a voice said "Hullo!" The dog barked worse than ever. Confusedly I rolled from my bunk, lighted a lamp and huddled some clothes upon me, my friend dressing also. We had heard nothing more, but Orlando did not for an instant stop barking.

Before drawing the bolt we asked who was there, and as no one replied, we gradually opened the door until the light from our lamp revealed Rodge Peake leaning against the wall outside.

His face was terribly white, and he was soaked with water. We each put a hand out and drew him in. He stood dripping, while the dog ceased his noise instantly and began smelling about this unexpected guest.

Now that the man was in the room we could detect the odor of whiskey, but he seemed perfectly sober. There was a look in his eyes which frightened me.

Poor Rodge

"Did you come for us? Is your wife worse?" asked my friend, quickly.

Mr. Peake turned sharply toward the speaker. He laughed a little as he said hoarsely, "My wife's dead. She died about midnight. I killed her."

We stood silent and trembling.

After a short time he laughed again, and said in the same voice, —

"She kinder took to you two. She used to talk consid'able 'bout you. You know she kissed you when she saw you last."

He turned to the open door, where the curtain of the rain fell steadily. He paused long enough to add: "'Thought I'd tell you. I guess I'll be goin' now. But I killed her. There ain't no mistake 'bout that part of it."

He stepped quickly out before we could think to stop him. When we did think, we ran after him, calling his name. But he was hidden in the dark and would not reply. Orlando found him, we knew by the dog's voice, but he could not bring him back.

We dressed fully and sat down, waiting until we could think what to do, and as we waited

In a Dike Shanty

the daylight began to grow. While it was still gray we put on water-proofs, and hurried, splashing through the pools of water, to Mr. Kendall's house on the road. To him we told our story. He was greatly concerned, but was inclined to think that Peake had got crazy with drink, and did not know what he said or did.

He said he would harness and go right over to Mr. Peake's. He did so, and we waited until his return. It kept raining in the same heavy way. We were thankful that Mrs. Kendall was not one of the talking kind, so that we could sit at the window and watch in silence. Very soon Mr. Kendall came back. He hurried into the house.

Mrs. Peake was dead. Rodge had been over to the Cut on business that afternoon, and he did not come home at supper time. Then his wife, who had been unusually bright all day, began to worry. Leife was off somewhere for the day. Mrs. Peake would not go to bed when it came bed-time. She told July Burns that she should n't rest, and she might as well be up. She expressed great fear that her husband had been seized with one of his 'tacks of

Poor Rodge

the nerves, and she was not able to take care of him. She said no one knew as she did what he needed at such times.

“I don’t think,” said Mr. Kendall, at this point, trying to steady his voice, “I don’t think July was as sympathetic with the poor woman as she might have ben. They say Virginy, who was up all the night before with her aunt, had gone to bed. I gethered from what July said herself, that she informed Mrs. Peake that Rodge was prob’ly drunk somewhere. When the sick woman heard her say that, she rose up from her chair and told July that she would never speak to her agin. She did n’t and she never will.”

It was about half-past eleven that Mrs. Peake heard a slight sound, as of some one falling near the door. She sprang up and out into the rain. There was Rodge, unable to walk steadily. His wife bent over him, thrusting July Burns back furiously. She got her husband inside the door.

She had her arm around him, and she had just said, “Poor Rodge! You’ve got one of them ’tacks agin, ain’t you?” when a thin

In a Dike Shanty

stream of bright blood came from her mouth, and she leaned up heavily against the man she was trying to help.

The sight of that blood sobered Rodge in an instant. He carried his wife into the sitting-room and put her on the lounge, kneeling beside it, she clinging feebly to him all the time. He said he would go for the doctor; but she would not let him stir.

"There ain't no need of a doctor," she said.

The blood stopped flowing almost directly. She said she was better, and held him tighter and tighter, until, all at once, the strength left her and she died.

Still he would not let her aunt or July take her from him. He kept swearing she had only fainted, until, all at once, it seemed to come to him that she was dead. Then he put her back on the lounge. He stood above her, looking down at her for many minutes.

Mrs. Peake's aunt, who told this to Mr. Kendall, said she had never seen a man's face look as did this man's as he stood there, his eyes on his dead wife.

Poor Rodge

So suddenly that they were not aware of what he was about, he turned away and left the house. They had not seen him since.

It was some hours later that he had come to our shanty. Mr. Kendall judged from what we told him that Rodge was suddenly crazed. A number of men started out to find him. The search was not long. Before noon they brought his body to his home. They had found him lying below one of the steep rocks on the shore. There was no life in him when they reached him. In falling he had broken his neck.

We did not stay at the dike long enough to hear the comments upon this tragedy. We began putting our things together the next morning that we might go in the afternoon train. We did not feel that we could listen to anything July Burns might say on the subject, and she had already begun travelling from house to house with her news.

While we were packing, some one silently approached our open door. It was Virginia, looking very hollow-eyed and worn. She sat down and seemed for the moment unable to speak.

In a Dike Shanty

At last she glanced round and said we did well to leave. She was going back that day to the East village where she boarded when she had taught school last spring. She could not stay another night where she had been living.

She shuddered and paused. After a while she added that she should start for the South in a week. We had been such friends that she would tell us that she was to be married on the 20th. She expected her betrothed to arrive on the 19th. She had been engaged for two years. Her lover was a Tallahassee gentleman.

“A Tallahassee gentleman!” unguardedly exclaimed my friend. “And what of Leife Peake? I am surprised.”

Miss Vance turned and looked full at the person who had spoken thus, but she did not speak.

“Do you love him?” I asked, with perhaps an unwise impulsiveness. I felt myself somewhat adrift regarding our caller and wished to get to some kind of anchorage if possible.

The girl rose as if to terminate the interview. She shook hands with my friend. When she came to me she took both my hands, kissed me

Poor Rodge

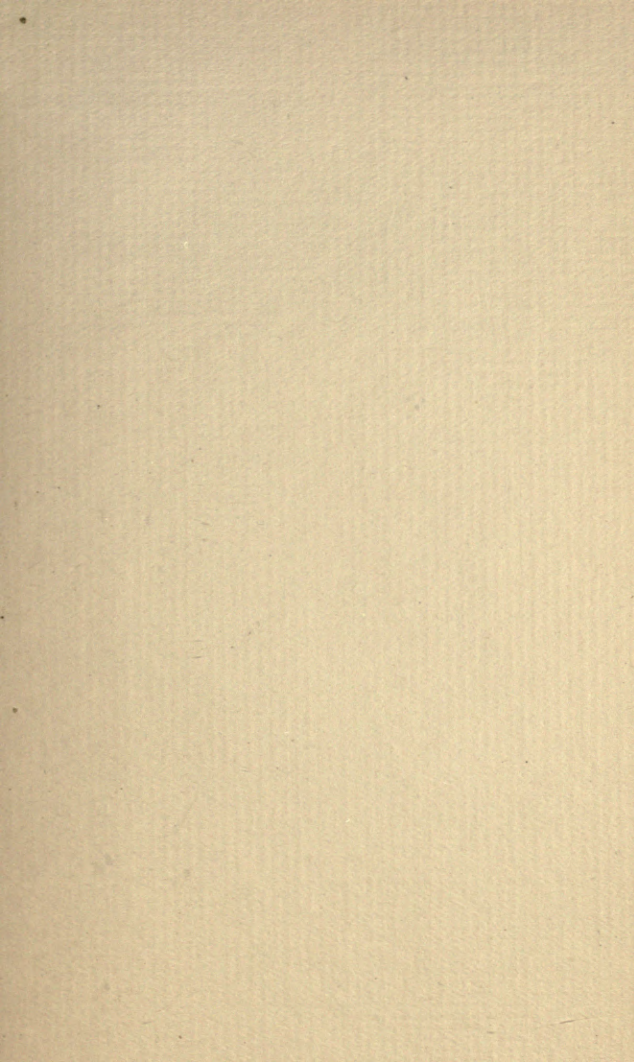
with tender deliberateness, and, with her head still bent toward me, and her eyes full of a lovely light, she whispered,—

“ Oh, yes, I love him.”

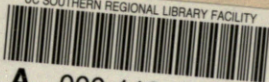
And I could not doubt her words, but still — then she went across the dike.

Now that we are back again in the wide, old-fashioned rooms of our inland farm-house, we should be inclined to think our shanty life a sort of a dream were it not for one thing ; that thing is Orlando, who sits gravely on the table at my elbow as I write this, and Orlando is very much of a reality.

I am convinced that he agrees with us in our conviction that his former mistress has no place in her heart for more than her Arthur. Orlando has adopted us, and we are now his women. Perish the hand that would part us !



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